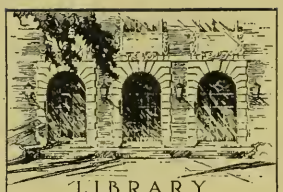

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A NARROW ESCAPE.

Reprinted from "All the Year Round."

By ANNIE THOMAS,

(Mrs. PENDER CUDLIP)

AUTHOR OF "DENIS DONNE," "NO ALTERNATIVE,"
ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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A NARROW ESCAPE.

CHAPTER I.

A GHOST ARISES.

"We must stay and see these two poor girls through this," Captain Bellairs says to Frank Forest one evening, as they are sauntering towards Watersmeet. The funerals are over, the dead are resting quietly in Lynton churchyard, and thoughts of the living are predominating again.

A Doctor and Mrs. Angerstein, the brother and sister-in-law of the deceased, have swooped down upon the widow, and at first to all appearances their breasts were surcharged with kindly sentiments. But a day or two and a discovery have altered this.

They have come down prepared to greet and treat her as a well dowered widow deserves to be greeted and treated in the family. But the family cannot find any will dated after the late Mr. Angerstein's marriage, and the one which they do find, and which is dated anterior to that event (which came about suddenly and secretly be it remembered), leaves everything—even the pretty villa at Barnes—to his brother and his brother's children. The poor, broken-down woman, who was rapidly getting tired—not of her husband, but of the ties that bound her to him—while he lived, is plunged now into one of those abysses of remorse, out of which cries will make themselves heard. "To lose him, and to be left poor, it's a judgment on me for looking at Harry again," she weeps out to Kate.

"The right will is sure to come to hand in time," Kate says, with the hopefulness that is apt to be the portion of the person who is not most profoundly interested in

the case; "and if it does not, your brother-in-law will give you your own, surely."

"My brother-in-law's wife would never relinquish one penny that came into her clutches," Mrs. Angerstein replies. "No, Kate, if there is no other will, my poor babies and I will be turned out to shift for ourselves; and what can I do?" the poor woman asks, a deadly conviction of her own incapacity overtaking her, as she pictures those children—in want.

"And what can I do?" Kate responds mournfully; for Kate, in losing her father, loses the little income his half-pay and pension made. She has faced the fact of the future penury, of the life of hard labour for herself, steadily enough, but now, when it seems to be becoming a certainty that Mrs. Angerstein's case is as bad, if not worse, inasmuch as the latter has children to support, Kate's heart goes very low under her poignant sense of her own inability to help.

"If I had ever so small a certainty, they should have that, and I could work for my-

self," she thinks; "but as it is, if I propose to her to link our wretched fortunes together, I may be an incumbrance rather than a stay to her."

It is under the influence of this state of feeling, of desire to help, and doubt and distrust of her own powers of helping, that she speaks to her cousin Frank.

"I have brains to help myself," she says confidently; "but I feel bound to help these poor dears too, with whom my lot has been cast so strangely lately. I am afraid there is no will later than this one which leaves everything to his brother."

"It's a most unfortunate acquaintance altogether," Frank answers, with a restless desire to remove the burden from Kate's shoulders, if possible, but certainly not to share it with her; "my advice to you is, to cut the concern, you can do her no good, you know, dear; go back to Dunster and wind up, and then go to my mother for a time—till—till we can settle things."

"She would die of dismay if I left her,"

Kate says; "I'm not going to have that on my conscience; while she needs help she'll have it from me, Frank, if I can give it to her."

"When they make Quixotic resolutions, women generally cause waves of sorrow to roll over their own heads," Frank replies, caustically, for again at this juncture he proposes uniting his fate and fortune with his cousin's, when he "can see his way;" but he does not feel at all disposed to unite either with Mrs. Angerstein and her helpless offspring. It may be added that neither does he, at present, "see his way." For May, though she is observing a stern silence, has not given him an official order of release yet.

It is after this little parley with Kate relative to her "Quixotic determination," that Frank is sauntering up to Watersmeet with a cigar in his mouth, and Captain Bellairs by his side. "We must stay and see these two poor girls through this," the latter has just observed, although, as yet, he has

not the least idea of the way in which either Frank or himself can be useful.

"I think the less we have to do with that woman the better," Frank says, sententiously; "not but what she is a very nice little woman as far as she goes, but Kate owed it to herself and to me to have been more careful. Naturally, you, as her father's friend, feel inclined to stick up for the poor little widow; you're right enough, and I should do the same thing in your place; but Kate may damage herself, don't you know."

Bellairs puffs away in silence. He has confided Cissy's secret, though not Cissy's name and present position, to the worldly, selfish sister of this worldly, selfish, impulsive, and still to a certain degree calculating man. As he remembers this, and reflects that this may be the means of depriving poor Cissy of her truest, staunchest woman-friend, he feels as if he had better have cut his tongue out than have spoken as he has spoken. But remorse is a vain thing. He

knows that he is called upon to say something.

"Your cousin will not be damaged, Forest; let her alone, she'll always do the right thing; if I had sisters of my own I should take my poor old friend's daughter to them now; as it is, for heaven's sake let your cousin obey her instincts, and go on playing the sweet merciful part she is playing."

There is angry silence between the two men after this. Each is disgusted with the other. Bellairs with Frank for his selfishness, Frank with Bellairs for his want of it. All the time Frank is writhing under the consciousness that he has not had it out yet with Kate about that idle tale which has been told against her by May. That it is an idle tale he is well convinced, but still the memory of it lingers, and has poisoned these last few days of almost unfettered intercourse with his cousin.

"You don't think that Miss Mervyn is the sort of a girl who'd ever be rash or imprudent at all, do you?" he asks, turning to

his friend; "I know her and understand her well, but I was wondering how her manner strikes a fellow who doesn't know her well."

Bellairs remembers the hot-headed, high-spirited girl of the old Torquay days, who rode so rashly at his bidding, and risked so much for his love. Remembering her thus — liking her better than ever now—burning with jealousy at her cousin's tone concerning her, he feels the blood mounting in a most compromising way to his brow.

"A fellow must be a cad who could misunderstand her," he says, distinctly; but the reassuring words do not reassure Frank, for he has seen that flush which betokens a consciousness of something unknown to him, spread over Captain Bellairs's face, and a vague suspicion haunts him, which he is half afraid to set at rest.

"She's rather headstrong, a habit that has grown out of that power she gained of twisting her poor father round her fingers," he says, presently; "but I believe if she loved a fellow, he might lead her by a silk thread;

but women dislike her, and are always making insinuations against her."

"I don't think I should care——" Captain Bellairs begins, and then he stops.

"Yes?" Frank interrogates.

"Well, I don't think I should care to see much more of a woman who made insinuations against her," Bellairs says, thinking that he was making a safe remark, inasmuch as he supposed the insinuations had been made by one of Frank's sisters.

"To tell the truth, I don't care very much to see any more of the woman who made them," Frank says, gloomily, as he recalls a vision of his irate and injured May; "but that's outside the question altogether." Then he reflects that he cannot discuss this vexed question which May has raised about his cousin with Bellairs, and comes to an awkward halt.

But later in the evening when Bellairs has gone back to his hotel, and the badly assorted Angersteins are striving to keep up the hollow appearance of being at peace with

and well disposed towards one another, Frank resolves to broach the subject to his harassed, unsettled cousin.

"Come out by the river, dear," he says, regardless of Mrs. Angerstein's little start of fright, and her look of appeal that she may not be left alone to the tender mercies of her terrible "own people;" and Kate, feeling only that she "may as well oblige him for the short time they are together," wraps a scarf about herself, and goes with him down to the banks of the boulder-interrupted Lyn.

They stand there for a few minutes looking at the shattered moonbeams sparkling like diamonds in the restive stream, and speculate as to whether the trout will bite to-morrow, and whether it will not be just as well for them all to go up and spend the day in the heart of the Doon Valley, as to spend it in Lynmouth, where all their emotions are visible to the eyes of the whole village, by reason of the stuffiness of the hot little lodgings, which obliges them to live

nearly at the open window. When they have settled this point in favour of the Doon Valley, Frank says that which he came out to say.

"I suppose you have not troubled yourself very much about my motive in coming down again so soon, have you, Kate?"

"I put it down to kind-heartedness; you knew my poor friend was in trouble about the death of her husband, and you thought that I should be in trouble on account of my friend; I never looked for any other motive, Frank," she says, giving him a glance that is intended to tell him that she neither expects nor wishes him to make love to her again.

"I had another motive, though," Frank says, brusquely enough, for he dislikes his self-imposed task very much indeed, now that he has fairly entered upon it.

"You had?" she asks, lifting her eyebrows; and with her eyes still bent on the river, she lifts her head a trifle higher, and prepares to listen to him, with a look of almost angry attention on her face.

"It's an awkward topic to broach to you, dear," he goes on, feeling every moment more embarrassed and uncomfortable; "but the long and short of it is, Kate, that some confounded gabbling fool has concocted a story in which your name is mixed up, and has been giving it out rather too publicly to be pleasant to—to those who love you."

"Yes?" she questions, as he comes to a full stop.

"Is that all you're going to say? Won't you ask me what the story is?"

"No," she says, with almost fierce decision.

"But, Kate," he protests, more humbly than he began, "it's a story that concerns your honour, and that ought to be refuted."

She looks at him with an intense questioning look in her eyes, but she does not speak. While he, though all his pulses are beating in response to that look, determines not to be subdued by it.

"Shall I tell you who told the story in a ball-room to a—a girl I know——" he is beginning, when she interrupts him.

"Say 'to Miss Constable' at once; yes, go on."

"It was a cousin of Clement Graham's."

She is moved now, in spite of all her efforts at self-control. The hand that is clasping the scarf trembles. The questioning eyes are veiled for a moment by the suddenly downcast lids. When they are lifted again, the eyes are dimmed with tears, and all the nervous sensitive face is quivering.

"A cousin of Clement Graham's, was it?" she asks, with a little sob in her voice; "Clement Graham might as well have let it rest."

He stands back from her as she says this, in utter dismay, almost in despair. Each instant he has been expecting to hear an indignant denial of the lie ring from her lips, and now she is almost confessing that it is a truth.

"Then Clement Graham does know something that you would rather he didn't know?" he asks, smothering, as well as he can, his mortification and disappointment.

She lowers her head now before she answers. All the old feeling of bitter humiliation—all the sensations of girlish despairing fear that by means of her own rash act she had wrecked her life, sweep over her mind again, as he ruthlessly tries to disinter the story.

"Clement Graham knows all that there was to know—more than I knew at the time, Frank," she mutters; "don't ask me about it; I was a fool, oh! such a loving, trusting fool, but nothing worse; don't be too harsh on me; it was such a brief dream, it was an error from beginning to end; don't torture me by making me resuscitate my buried but never forgotten dead."

She inclines herself nearer to him as she speaks, and, strong in his outraged Philistine strength, he takes no notice of the mute appeal. Each word she utters in her igno-

rance of how the story he has heard may be exaggerated, condemns her the more entirely in his estimation. He believes the worst of May's statements, and also believes that May's innocence has been a shield against the telling of the even worse things there are to state. Better life with May a thousand times than with Kate, who has the false, will-o'-the-wisp glitter about her of having cleared herself, like an adventuress, from the dangers and disgrace she had incurred as a girl.

"We'll be good friends, and—cousins still, Kate," he says, rather brokenly; "and I'll keep things square in the family for you, and make May understand that she had better keep her knowledge to——"

"What!" she interrupts; "is it to May I owe this? Well, Frank, it's a just Nemesis no doubt—the part I have played towards her has not been the most generous in the world."

"I oughtn't to have brought her name into it," he says, sulkily; "she only repeated to me a piece of ball-room chatter, which

she didn't very much credit, and I determined to clear up; however, you confirm it, so there's nothing more to be said on that subject; you never told me you had been at Torquay with your father."

"The memory of the days there was not so blessed that I should seek to recall it," she says, bitterly; and in that confession, and the tone in which it is made, he hears confirmation strong of the truth of that story which will prevent his ever making Kate Mervyn his wife. While she, watching him, reads in his face such condemnation of herself, that she dare not explain to him how free from blemish her conduct had really been.

"I'm shivering," she presently says; "and we've said all we have to say to each other —all we ever shall have to say to each other; I shall go back;" then she hesitates for an instant before she perpetrates the worst mistake she can make.

"Don't say a word of this to Captain Bellairs," she says, piteously. "I should be

sorry for him to think——" she breaks down before she can say, "I should be sorry for him to think he has spoilt my life." Frank naturally attaches quite a different meaning to her unuttered words.

CHAPTER II.

"MY ONLY FRIEND!"

THERE is after this no more pleasure, no more confidence, no more unrestraint in the intercourse between the two cousins. The bitter fruits of the mistake they make in not coming to a full explanation are these. The girl thinks he judges her cruelly for that by-gone folly, while on the other hand Frank firmly believes, from her manner, from her confusion, from her halting admissions and reserve (which, according to the almost invariable habit of women, she maintains in the wrong place), that, though May has "nothing extenuated," she has "set down naught in malice," in all that she has said and implied respecting Kate.

It is natural, under these circumstances,

that Frank should be desirous of getting himself back to town with as little delay as possible. No good end can now be attained by his remaining here. Estranged from Kate, suspicious of her, doubtful now of what her motives may have been all along, bitterly condemnatory of her as he is, he still loves her so much better than he loves any one else, that there is actual pain to him in her presence. While, as for her, she is beginning to despise him for what appears to her to be mere conventional cowardice, and to feel positive shame for having allowed herself to love "so slight a thing."

Therefore he stands not much upon the order of his going, but goes, after a few strained sentences to Kate; a few words of interest and affection, too carefully chosen for her to believe them genuine, or to prize them in the lightest degree.

"You know that I shall always feel the keenest interest in your welfare, Kate, dear," he says, rather hoarsely, just before he goes;

"if I ever can help you, you'll let me, won't you?"

"I think you can help me best by forgetting me, Frank; I want to ring out the old, and ring in the new; our ways in the world will be very widely apart in the future, and we had better not put the stumbling-block of any recollections of one another in our paths. I know you mean kindly now, and I know you have always meant kindly, but——"

"I wish to Heaven we had never met, and I wish more fervently still that we were not compelled to part," he says, brokenly.

"But it's inevitable," she breaks in; and then she bends her pride to say, "let my aunt think of me as she has always thought of me, will you; unless May"—(and now there is a little jealous bitterness infused into her tone) "unless May has done her best—and worst—already!"

It is vain after this to say anything more. The man goes back to his wealthy, well-secured, and most wearisome fate, and the

woman takes up the burden of life again, not even saying, by way of sadly consoling herself, "it might have been," for something whispers to her that, hard as it is, it is better so.

"When the cottage is let, and the furniture sold, and the half-pay that is due paid in to me, I shall have about two hundred pounds," Kate says to Mrs. Angerstein about an hour after Frank has left them. She has spent this hour in making calculations, for calculations about the furniture are pleasanter companions than are the memories of the past.

"That won't last long," Mrs. Angerstein, who has been accustomed to spend two hundred a year on her own dress, answers dolefully.

"Oh! yes; it will last us till we can look round and see what we can do, or till the will is found," Kate says hopefully; while Mrs. Angerstein melts into tears that are partly due to a burst of grateful feeling towards Kate for so evidently intending to

share her cruize of oil with the widow and fatherless, and partly to a hopeless conviction that there will be no finding of any will, and that the wronged will never be righted.

"When you go back to Dunster what shall I do?" she asks hysterically; "you are my only friend."

"While you feel that, Cissy, you shall go wherever I go, and share whatever I have," Kate responds promptly, though she cannot help feeling that the phrase, "You are my only friend," falls with the glibness of custom from Mrs. Angerstein's lips. "To how many other people has she said it, I wonder?" Kate thinks cynically. "Well! I'll accept the post willingly enough till she finds a better one."

There is a hollow form of apparently friendly intercourse maintained still between the widow and Doctor and Mrs. Angerstein. But the latter lady is longing to throw off the mask and throw down the glove, and do open battle if need be with the sister-in-law whom she has always doubted and

disliked, and over whom she would now ride rough-shod if she dared, in a way that is felt by all the others, but that cannot be defined and consequently cannot be openly resented. Mrs. Angerstein, the wife, makes manifest that she considers herself rather too pure and good to be brought into close contact with Mrs. Angerstein, the widow. What she says to her husband in the privacy of domestic life they do not know, but they perceive that the unhappy man becomes daily more and more embarrassed and constrained, and every word of kindness, every little act of attention which he gives and pays to his unhappy sister-in-law now is given and paid surreptitiously.

"We have made up our minds to go home to-morrow," he explains nervously to poor Cissy, as he manages to get her alone with him one morning; "but, before I go, my dear, I want you to understand that if I alone were concerned, there should be no difficulty about this business; but you see there are others, there are others."

He sinks his voice mysteriously as he says this, and Cissy goes to him, and clasps her hands; and between the paroxysms of her sobs wails out an appeal to him to be merciful to her and to her children, to remember his dead brother, to save her from despair!

Doctor Angerstein is a hard man about many things. He is also a hen-pecked husband; but he has a certain amount of human feeling about him, and all that he has is stirred now. He gives his sister-in-law one hasty kiss, he beseeches her "not to cry," and promises that he will "see what can be done, quietly, by her lawyer and himself." "No one must hear of this," he adds, energetically, and then he says something about "a trifle just for present expenses," as he takes his purse out, and extracts some bank-notes from it.

The transfer is nearly made, he is fluttering them towards her, and her hand is partly outstretched to receive them, when all his faculties are paralysed, all his generous intentions nullified, by the basilisk glance

of his wife. There is no mistaking the angry sparkles that scintillate from beneath those white eyelashes. There is no mistaking the savage compression of the lips, or the lurid red flush that overspreads her face. Jealousy is reigning side by side in her heart with hatred, and Doctor Angerstein knows the domestic genius of his hearth and home too well, not to clearly understand that his powers will henceforth be more cramped than they have been heretofore.

"I was just going to send a trifle to the children, my dear—their uncle and aunt's parting gift," he explains, sheepishly, and he tries what the effect of a little gay-hearted laugh may be. But his hand trembles so that the bank-notes rustle like aspen leaves, and neither of the women are deceived for an instant by the laughter.

"You needn't change a note for that," Mrs. Angerstein says, with suave spite. "I have plenty of silver" (as she speaks she takes three half-crowns from her purse), "just for them to buy a little toy to re-

member uncle and auntie by," she continues; tendering the money to Cissy, while her husband watches the scene, biting his lips, and being more thoroughly ashamed of himself and his wife than he has ever been before.

"The children shall come and take it from you themselves, and thank you for it, as you deserve to be thanked, and remember you, as you deserve to be remembered by them," Cissy says; and her tears dry themselves as she speaks. There is something in her quiet air, in her gentle breeding, that almost cows the underbred shrew who is trying to trample upon her; and, under the smarting sense of inferiority, Mrs. Angerstein registers a vow that those three half-crowns shall be the sole pecuniary aid extended from her side of the house to "the creature" who had so nearly wheedled Dr. Angerstein out of those bank-notes.

It is vain, after this, to hope for better things, or to trust that an amicable and just arrangement may be come to between the

defrauded widow and her grasping relatives. Dr. Angerstein makes one or two futile little efforts to see Cissy alone again; but Cissy's pride is in arms now. She will not go a step to meet him, and his wife watches him keenly, and is ready to intervene at any moment. So the time passes away very slowly and miserably, until the hour of their departure. Then Mrs. Angerstein fires her last and heaviest shot.

"I don't presume to offer you advice, Mrs. Edward," the well-off, vicious, secure married woman says; "but I must say that the world will have a better opinion of you, if you put a stop to the extreme intimacy which has grown up between you and this Captain Bellairs—so soon after your poor dear husband's death."

If there is one thing more infuriating than another to a woman who is deterred by circumstances from openly defending her position, it is this of hearing a man for whom she has a regard spoken of slightingly as "this" so-and-so. Cissy Angerstein is

no exception to this general rule. She feels wrath rising within her; for a few moments she strives to bridle it. Then the remembrance of all the wrongs she has suffered, of all the wrongs she may have to suffer in the future at the hands of this woman, who is longing to defraud, and judge, and condemn her, rises up and overbalances Cissy's always weak judgment.

"Happily for me, neither you nor the world can put an end to that intimacy," she cries out shrilly in her injudicious rage. "You may rob me of everything else, but you cannot rob me of my only friend."

As she utters the last words Kate comes in, and hears them, and is touched by the piteous appeal of them, and the helplessness of the woman who utters them.

"They cannot rob you of your only friend, you're right, Cissy—but you are worse than mean, and cruel, to try," Kate says, hotly, turning all the fire of her force upon Mrs. Angerstein, who replies as broken-down Cissy lapses into a state of general inability—

"How kind you are to be sure, Miss Mervyn: such disinterested friendship deserves a reward; it happens though that Mrs. Edward wasn't speaking about you—to tell the truth, she can hardly be said to have given you a thought—for she was speaking of Captain Bellairs, as 'her only friend.'"

The blow is well aimed, for it goes straight home to the very heart of Kate's pride. This man, who has nearly touched her to tenderness again, lately, by an exhibition of most touching tenderness on his own part towards her, has been at the same time making himself the "only friend"—the hope, and stay, and guiding star—of this frail, rudderless bark, which Kate has sworn to pilot, so long as she can keep afloat herself. He must have been deceiving her, he must have been playing a double game, or Cissy would not claim him as so entirely her own.

"Not that I would take him from her: not that I am ready to love him again, or

desirous that he should love me again," she says to herself—and she tries to think that she is telling herself the truth. Only it is hard to be cut out by anybody. Fallen humanity cannot soar to the height of liking to be overlooked, or deserted, or befooled. Above all, it is hard to be cut out by one's own familiar friend, with whom one cannot quarrel without making manifest the cause of such quarrel to the whole world. Happily for the preservation of her own dignity, Kate bears these truths in mind, and putting a calm aspect on, restores Cissy to self-possession, and refrains from answering Mrs. Angerstein altogether.

"I have just been speaking to Captain Bellairs, Cissy," Kate says; as affectionately as if she were not already a little bit jealous of Cissy; "and he agrees with me, that you had better come back to Dunster with me, till I can settle my affairs."

"I shall be a burden on you," Cissy protests; though all the time she fully intends to go back to Dunster with Kate, and be a

burden on the latter, until some brighter prospect opens. Nor must she be considered unduly selfish for intending to do so. We are all apt to absorb the aid that is offered us, and some of us are apt to forget that we have so absorbed it, when something better turns up to supersede it.

So now, though Cissy protests; "I shall be a burden on you, Kate," she quite means to cast that burden on Kate's stronger shoulders; until such time as the will is found, or some other even happier fortune befalls her.

"I'll go and pack up some of our belongings," Kate says magnanimously in the evening, and she goes away to her self-imposed task, leaving Captain Bellairs and his troublesome charge alone.

To tell the truth, though the situation is embarrassing to them both, it is infinitely more embarrassing to the man than to the woman. He has begun to realize that Cissy's feeling for him is warmer than is well, and he greatly fears that in her weak-

ness, shattered as she is by losses that are very grievous to her, she may betray herself in a way that will oblige him to be colder and harder to her than he desires to be. Impulsive as he is, he has never once been moved by any sort of feeling for the pretty woman by his side. It is terrible to him, therefore, to feel that she in her heart has gone so far beyond him: terrible to him to fear that if he allows himself to show her the kindness he feels for her, she may misunderstand it and him, and exaggerate his motive and meaning.

He tries to lead her to speak openly and hopefully of her plans and prospects: he tells her as delicately as he can that he will secure the grandchildren of his old friend, her father, such an income as will remove all fear "of their ever needing anything" from her mind; he entreats her to "continue to look upon him as her brother," and to his annoyance she remains profoundly dejected and reproachfully silent. He is giving much to her—time, care, consideration, affection, of

a true order. But he is not giving her what she has weakly, vainly, suffered herself to believe he would give.

"I can't endure this close room any longer," she says with plaintive petulance, after a time; "everything seems more gloomy and hopeless in it; will you take me for a little walk?"

"Yes, let us call Kate," he answers.

"No, no; if you can't go without Kate, I would rather stay here and broil," she says, with a pout that compels him to resign himself to the inevitable and take her out alone.

"I want you to take me up to Lynton churchyard," she whispers; and he guides her up the hill gladly, feeling that there will be immunity from any display of tender feeling on her part, while they are by her husband's grave.

But "woman's at best a contradiction still;" by that grave she droops down helplessly on her knees, and sobs out in a paroxysm of love and remorse and despair—

"He's better dead, poor fellow; he'd have found out in time that I never really loved him. Oh, Harry! don't hate me and despise me."

CHAPTER III.

AN ANGEL IN THE HOUSE.

The arrangements for the wedding are all happily concluded, and Frank Forest and May are to be married without any further unnecessary delay. Their friends say that the union is "founded on a reasonable basis." They are entering on life's journey together, well prepared to be a great deal apart, and perfectly resigned to the fact that they are not at all essential to each other's happiness. The man has never had one single warm sentiment for this girl, whom he is going to pledge himself to love and cherish for the remainder of his life. He has never attempted to woo her, and she weds him without a particle of real love. Nevertheless, she expects a great deal from

him, for she is giving him her money, and a show of love and devotion, and a certain amount of respectability; while he is giving her his name, "a name which is most unhappily associated with the stage," as her family take care to inform the friends who grace the ceremony with their essentially dull but eminently respectable presence.

There is one bitter drop in young Mrs. Forest's cup of sweetness on this triumphant day. Frank has been meekness itself, in his manner of falling in with all the arrangements that the Constables have made for the wedding festivities. He has gone like a lamb to the slaughter, and his conduct has been pronounced to be "most pleasing and becoming" by the mother of the bride. But for all this outward show of complete submission, he has infused one bitter drop in that bride's cup to-day. He has not given her the opportunity of "refusing on principle" to invite Kate Mervyn to the wedding.

When a woman prepares herself for a

moral struggle with a man, and knows that she holds the stronger position, and that victory must eventually be on her side, it is disappointing to see that her antagonist does not mean to be antagonistic. May has been preparing herself to be surprised, outraged, virtuously disgusted, by his requesting her to have Kate for one of her bridesmaids. When he not only does not do this, but even refrains from asking her to invite Kate at all, May feels that she has prepared her munitions of war for nothing, and a sense of disappointment and injury takes possession of her, which grows stronger and stronger, until the hour arrives when she is alone for the first time with her husband, in a position to say what she thinks with impunity.

The time chosen by her is extraordinary, to say the least of it. She chooses to open her mind to him as they head the procession on their way home from the church. Having helped her to settle her voluminous draperies, Frank feels that the time has come for him to make some neat and appropriate

remark to his wife—the first appalling responsibility concerning her, which overwhelms a newly married man.

"Well, May, we've done it," he says, and he does not say it too hopefully; but he puts his hand on the plump one which is adorned by the little bar of gold which he has put as a barrier for ever between Kate and himself.

"Yes; we're married, and I'm glad all the fuss is over; it's been a most trying time. Mamma and all of them wondered I didn't break down and get quite ill. I wish you had got a thicker ring, Frank; these small ones are quite old-fashioned."

"Oh, never mind the ring," Frank says, rather hastily. The ring is quite thick and strong enough to bind his May to him for life, he feels. "What have you had to make you ill, dear? Didn't your dresses come home when you expected them?"

All this time he has never offered her one caress beyond that slight hand-pressure. But, as he says these words, he bends his

head, and is about to kiss her forehead, when she draws it back from him, and says—"You shall not kiss me until you tell me the reason why you have not spoken to me about your cousin lately—never once since you came back from that visit you paid to Lynmouth. Is she so precious to you that you can't mention her?"

"You must be beside yourself to speak to me in this way at this time, May," the staggered young husband answers. "For Heaven's sake, don't begin your married life by making an accusation against her, or degrade me by compelling me to commence mine with a defence."

His tone is sterner than she has ever heard it before. A qualm of fear paralyses for a moment her rather small spirit. Then she remembers some words that have been sagely spoken to her this morning by her sister—words weighted by experience, and successful experience, too; for a tamer husband than Mr. Grange it is impossible to find.

"Don't let him gain the mastery in the beginning, May; if you do, he will keep it always. I see that Frank is a man who will do anything to avoid being talked at, so talk at him well at first," Mrs. Grange had said, while arranging the bridal wreath for her sister. May recalls the saying now, and proceeds to act upon it.

"I don't make any accusation against you," she says quickly. "It must be your own conscience accusing you. I only ask, why you don't even mention your cousin? I have a right to ask whether or not what I told you about her is true; for if it is true, I will not risk my reputation by associating with her."

They are at home by this time, and he has to hand his wife out of the carriage. As he does it he contrives to say—

"Have your own way in this matter, May; you are free to choose your own acquaintances, but for Heaven's sake don't speak slightingly of my cousin to me, or to my mother and sisters."

"If you'll promise never to speak to your cousin again," the bride whispers eagerly, "I'll promise for my part never to mention her, or a word of her story (I'm sure it's true, from your manner), to any one in the world; there, Frank! is it a bargain?"

"It is a bargain," he mutters; and, though he feels very servile for submitting to this compromise, in his confusion he can devise no other means of securing his cousin's good name.

The newly-made wife stands on tip-toe, as soon as she gains the seclusion of the drawing-room, and holds her lips to him to be kissed at last. But even she (enveloped as she is in a robe of self-satisfaction, and unworthy elation at having achieved a victory so soon) feels that surely the kiss bestowed by him is colder than ever bridegroom bestowed upon a bride before.

"You're not angry with me? you do love me, don't you, Frank?" She asks it with a certain amount of asperity, without a particle of that winning charm which makes

the plea for love a reason why love should be rendered to the pleader.

"No—yes I mean," he answers vaguely; and his eyes rove restlessly away from her face, and lighten with something like pleasure as he sees that many other members of the wedding party are coming into the hall. Already he shrinks from being alone with his wife!

Through this, the dreariest breakfast of which he has ever partaken in his life, he sits as one in a dream. He has been steeped in deadly gloom at other men's wedding breakfasts, but he has always had the saving reflection that he can get out of it presently, that he is not hampered, for more than the passing hour, by the flowery fetters that are twining about everything, from the bride's head to the cake's base. But now, he looks at the fair creature by his side, who is posing elegantly in the midst of her billowy waves of satin sheen and misty tulle, and remembers that he is responsible for her well-being and happiness for the remainder

of her life. He also remembers that he has promised never to speak to his cousin again. What wonder that this is the dreariest breakfast, the saddest, most hopeless and humiliating hour he has ever passed through?

But the families of Constable and Forest being at rest in their minds at last about the result, seem to be perfectly satisfied with things as they are. Whatever motherly feeling of regret there is for the sorrow that must eventually ensue from this heartless, soulless marriage, does not betray itself in Mrs. Forest's face or bearing. She looks proudly at rest about him; for though a pang every now and then contracts her heart as she remembers Kate—remembers that Kate is terribly tabooed in the home circle for some cause into which she dares not enter—still she is free from all further responsibility concerning her son. She loves him dearly, in her way. But, at the same time, she knows full well that he is capable of offending her, and that she is equally capable of being offended by him. "It

would have been a terrible thing to have been obliged to bend Frank's spirit by letting him feel the want of money; at the same time, as a mother, it might have been my bounden duty to have done so. Now he is safe, and the power of justly punishing him is taken out of my hands," she thinks with a certain sense of elation, as she looks at the happy man.

It is decreed that the young people are to live within easy reach of both families: so a dwelling has been provided for them on Campden Hill, and appointed gloriously, according to the taste of one of the excellent firms who advertise to fit us out, in half an hour, with every one of the necessaries and luxuries of life. It is gorgeous with gilt, and glitters with the best and brightest of comfortable modern furniture, and with costly flowers and foliage from the tropics. The dining-room is magnificently large and gloomy. "We can entertain twenty people at that table pleasantly," May says, calculatingly, and Frank shudders as he hears.

The drawing-room is a triumph of conventionalism, and May's own boudoir is fitted up with the ravishing taste that upholsterers are apt to display when they are left to their own devices, and allowed to work their wicked will unchecked by the dread of long-deferred payment. Life ought to go on well-oiled wheels in such a house as this; yet when Frank enters it for the first time as May's husband, his heart goes down to dreary depths as he reflects that his life will probably be passed in this unhomelike place, in which he may neither receive nor mention the one woman in the world who has made his heart throb with genuine passion—his cousin Kate!

He recalls himself with a start to a sense of his duty. The woman he has married is void of all offence against him, save this, that she has married him. She deserves something more considerate at his hands than this marked depression, this painful silence, this early display of repugnance to the way in which his future has been ar-

ranged for him. Thinking this, he leads her into the only room in the house in the arrangement of which he has been suffered to have a voice—his study—and says to her—

"Home at last, May; let us vow to make it as happy a home as we can for each other!" He speaks very gently, for he has a man's pitifulness for her weakness and womanliness, though he has no love for her as his wife. It grates upon him, therefore, when she answers, with a little pettish knitting of the brows—

"I am sure I shall do my best to see that there is no waste or extravagance, Frank; I don't know who ought to superintend a house well if I can't; but it's rather soon to begin talking about such things, is it not?"

This is the way in which she meets his endeavours to come to a fair and friendly understanding early in their married life. She no more comprehends his need of encouragement at this juncture, than she does his light comedies, or his yearning for sym-

pathy. She is thinking of her presses full of linen, and her chests full of plate, and she is determining within herself that she will make a better appearance, and live in better style by means of her admirable management, than any one else with about the same income in their circle of acquaintances. Frank, under her auspices, shall learn at last what it is to have all at command that man requires below, be it much or be it long, without any of that shifting or contriving for it which is so abhorrent to her dainty soul.

She proceeds after dinner, on this first night of their return, to plan out her line of action for to-morrow, with the gushing vigour of an unsatiated school-girl. She desires to impress several of her girl friends with ideas of her omnipotence and her elysium, and she scarcely knows how to do it without "huffing" Frank. For Frank is not at all the sort of man who suffers himself to be taken round with the blue ribbon round his neck; and if she can safely and

conveniently get rid of him for to-morrow, well, she will be so thoroughly well satisfied that even defective linen-presses will not disturb her.

He is burying himself in the daily papers as she comes to this conclusion, and he lifts up his head and advances a proposition which falls in with that conclusion in a way that is inexplicable, if it is not magnetic.

"I must get some regular fixed editorial work, May," he says, and there is a soupçon of honest excitement in his tone; "I see that Clarkhurst and Brydges are advertising a new monthly venture, I shall go up and see them to-morrow; I might fill the post."

"It's more respectable than writing for the stage, at all events," May observes, reflectively. "Yes; I don't see why you shouldn't do it; none of our friends would know of it, you know, that's a great thing; and it would keep you at home quiet, wouldn't it?"

"It would keep me uncommonly quiet in an office in the city, probably," he rejoins.

"Oh! away from home? Well, that has its advantages and disadvantages, Frank; you wouldn't be here when I wanted you very often, but I could look after things while you're away, and there's a great deal saved if one's always looking after things."

"I've no doubt you're right," Frank says; "but if you mean to pass your existence in 'looking after things,' will it be a pleasant one?"

"Pleasant or not, I know what I undertook when I married," May says, crossly; "there's always something to be seen to in a house, and always something going wrong if you're not looking about you. You must be after them from morning till night, Frank, if you would keep servants straight; you must indeed."

She gives out her views on domestic economy with exasperating vigour and violence. Blessings on any duties, however onerous, thinks Frank, as he listens, which will take him away from his own home; blessings on any firm, however obscure,

which will, in a business-like way, induct him into those duties!

"Well, you'll have plenty of time to watch the things going wrong," he says, with a slight scoffing laugh. "I shall be out all day long if I carry out an idea I have got in my head——"

"An idea about one of those horrid theatres?" she asks, with a gasp. "Frank! if you have anything more to do with them in the day-time"—May has an idea that the shades of night sanctify theatrical proceedings somehow or other—"my family will be seriously offended."

He expresses a wish, rather forcible than polite, about her family.

"And they have been so generous to you!" May urges in savage tones of remonstration; "they have given you all this—for it's all our money; and you can bring yourself to speak so!"

Oh! helpmeet worthy of a man!

CHAPTER IV.

CLARKHURST AND BRYDGES.

"EVEN the things I bought myself, with my own money, they will rob me of," Mrs. Angerstein murmurs plaintively to Captain Bellairs, in the midst of this the twentieth interview to which she has summoned him since her return to the Barnes cottage. The poor woman is clinging to the pretty home, that has been hers so long, to the very last. After the manner of women, she feels that it is dearer than ever to her now that she is about to lose it. While she reigned securely here she found the security dull, for it implied a life of peaceful monotony, and ever-recurring domestic duties. But now that she is to be torn from it by fate, in the form of a sister-in-law, all the good old love

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for the place that was her first married home comes back, and overwhelms her, and makes her more weakly reliant on any human being who will permit him or herself to be relied upon, than she has ever been before.

It must be admitted that Captain Bellairs is here very much against his inclination, and sense of what is good for them both. Ever since that scene by the grave in Lynton churchyard, he has striven to guard himself at all points against her. He has told himself that, as she can never touch his heart to love, so she shall never touch his manly pity for the weak and pilotless into the show of the faintest semblance of love. He will be sternly fraternal in his dealings with her. He will reprimand and preach as only an eloquent Irishman can do these things. He will be good and cold to Cissy. He will be adviser, guardian, mentor, friend, everything in fact, save lover to her. Resolving thus, he goes at her bidding two or three times a week to the pretty cottage at Barnes.

The poor helpless woman is so utterly unhappy that no man who is endowed with a man's heart can help pitying her. Pretty and poverty stricken, proud in the wrong way, and as incapable as a baby, she stands before him, appealingly wringing her nerveless hands, and narrating her wrongs. What can he do? He must be soft to a certain degree, because the world has been so very very hard.

"My poor Cissy," he says. "My poor Cissy, have patience, good will come out of all this evil; there's a silver lining to every cloud, you know."

"Yes, I have heard that often before," she interrupts very softly.

She has this charm, that she speaks very softly on all occasions of excitement. She never startles people into discretion by wording her views with heart, and heat, and force enough to make them realize that she has any views about which they may be reasonably startled. When she speaks now, for example, Harry Bellairs is chiefly struck by

her great patience. She tells him in the midst of her great tribulation that she has heard causes assigned for that tribulation having come upon her before! "Some people say it's because I have been very, very wicked, Harry," she says in penitential tones. "I believe that, I acknowledge the justice of the punishment, but don't talk to me about silver linings, the clouds that are lowering over me will never show a bit of them. You remember what I said to you in the churchyard, what I said to you in my agony, Harry"—she goes on after a pause: "I can't recall the words, and I can't make you understand how sorry I am that I ever spoke them; forget them——!"

"If I can I will," he says, gravely. "Once for all, Cissy; I have treated you and cared for you as I would have treated and cared for a sister. Let me continue to do so."

"Forgive me," she mutters humbly, "for my father's sake; and advise me. Kate Mervyn wishes me to live with her; but if I do that I shall be a burden on her, and

other people will think me mean-spirited. Oh, Harry, how could he die and leave me in such a plight? it was too cruel. I can't mourn for him as I would have mourned, if he had not left me carelessly to be the foot-ball of a hard world."

He reminds her that the man of whom she is speaking had been very tender and true to her, that he was the father of her children, that it is unwomanly as well as unwifely on her part to make bitter mention of him, because of that want of forethought which has left her in a worse case than he found her in eight years ago. All this Captain Bellairs tells her, and all this she knows full well already, and she is not comforted by it, nor in any way more resigned than before he began speaking.

"Remain with Kate if you possibly can," he says; "she will always be the best friend you can have——"

"How can I remain with her when she hasn't enough for herself, and I have nothing?" she asks petulantly; and then

he makes a proposition which has been in his mind ever since the day of Mr. Angerstein's death.

"You appealed to me just now by your father's memory," he says; "remember that he left you to my care, that he charged me to treat you in all respects as if you were my sister in reality. Why bemoan the loss of this property, Cissy? you must know that you will have an income assigned to you by me."

The blood rushes to her face in a scarlet wave, as she answers, with something like resolution—

"No, no! What you do for my children I accept gratefully; but, Harry, if I lived on your bounty, who knows better than you do what the world would say? It shall not say that of us."

It is in vain that he urges, persuades, scolds this adopted sister of his. She is refractory in the matter. She will take his money for her children, but not for herself; and somehow or other he finds

himself respecting her for her obstinacy, although he censures her strongly for it. Her determination not to do anything that may cause him to be maligned, or to have his motives and actions misinterpreted, touches him; for, to tell the truth, he had not thought that Cissy was capable of such self-denial.

"There's better stuff in her than I thought there was," he says; "however, she must be made secure some way or other. I shall talk to Kate about it, and leave the matter of the management to her. The poor girl has suffered enough in her life; if money will spare her any further suffering, she shall be spared against her will, and without her knowledge."

It is difficult for him to see Kate in those days though, for Miss Mervyn is busily engaged in seeking a new home, and finding fresh occupation for herself. "Like Dead Sea fruits that tempt the eye and turn to ashes on the lips," the latter is continually "almost" within her reach, and as continu-

ally evading her. She has carefully appraised her own talents and accomplishments, and has come to the conclusion that, as regards the latter, she is too insufficiently grounded to be justified in volunteering to teach them to others, who under her auspices will only do as she does, or perhaps even worse. She has "looked about" and answered advertisement after advertisement, and at length she has been rewarded. The editor of Clarkhurst and Brydges's magazine, "The Unwarrantable," has responded to a bold-hearted appeal she has made to him with the welcome words that he "will give his immediate attention to anything she may do him the honour of sending to him; and that he feels sure that he will be only too glad to add her name to his list of regular contributors."

This answer is so startlingly polite that Kate cannot but feel a certain amount of feminine curiosity as to the author of it.

Her experience in these matters is but limited, but she knows well that not so are

editors wont to respond to would-be contributors who are novices. Accordingly she writes to the mysterious being at the official address, and receives for answer that he will be unable to give her a personal interview for a month, during which month he hopes to see her firmly established as a regular contributor to his journal, a pledged member of his staff.

It all goes on so smoothly that the girl is bewildered at her own success, and loses her head a little. She cannot but believe that there is something grand in this God-given talent of hers by which she coins so readily the money she needs so sorely. It has been lying dormant all her life, but it has sprung up vigorous and full of vitality, now that the need has come for the development of it. She writes pretty stories of love and folly, of struggle and defeat, of summer suns and winter glooms, and they "take;" odd as it may appear to every one, they take and are published, and paid for; and the first time Kate sees her stories in print, she

yields to her yearning to know the man who has printed them, and goes up to the office of "The Unwarrantable" with her heart full of gratitude.

There is a little hesitation on the part of the office clerk before he recognizes her claim to be admitted to the presence of the reigning power. He surveys Kate coolly and impertinently, and "likes the look of her," as he tells his friends at his club; but he will not attempt to gain her instant admission to the presence of his chief.

"It's no good seeing 'im," he tells her. "You might as well try to get a sight of the Sultan. I can do all the business for you, I'll put you in the way."

"I shall see the editor himself," she says very quietly, and she hands her card to the clerk.

He makes one further effort towards establishing intimate relations with her before he takes her card to his chief.

"You trust to me, and don't bother your brains about 'im," he says; "he never reads

anything that's sent; I do all that, and I tell him what's worth 'aving, and what would run the blessed magazine down; I've been longer at it than 'e 'as, bless you; 'e's a swell, tip-top, the right thing and no mistake, and I've been a bookseller's 'ack for four or five years; you trust to me."

"Take my card to your master," Miss Mervyn says in the chilliest accents she has at command; and in obedience to her mandate, this puny god, who sits a little way up Parnassus, does his proper work, and takes Miss Mervyn's name to his "master."

The great unknown editor of the grand young Unwarrantable, appears to be very inaccessible to-day. Time elapses before the patronizing clerk reappears, and when he comes, he comes with a message to the effect that if Miss Mervyn can wait for twenty minutes the editor will see her at the expiration of them. So Kate resigns herself and waits, with the daily papers, and the clerk, and wonders "what Frank would think of all this."

By-and-by a scrubby but respectful boy slides down stairs, and requests her to follow him to the presence. She goes, "scarce knowing what she seeks," but feeling sure that she is approaching some climax that will mark an epoch in her destiny. With one cheering, reassuring word to her own fainting spirit, with one quick gesture that brings the thick crape veil more closely over her face, she rises and follows her guide through evil-looking passages, into a severe but comfortable apartment. The heart of the office! the editor's sanctum! Before she can realize that it is these things, her hands are taken, and her name is spoken by her cousin Frank.

They stand hand in hand for a few moments, speechless, overpowered, incapable; for she has never known the name of the editor of "The Unwarrantable," and she has written to him under an assumed one. At the expiration of these few moments, she recovers her powers of speech and judgment, and says to him—

"How splendidly you could have helped me on if you had not been my cousin; now I shall always dread that you will be a partial judge, and so I shall never dare to send you anything; nor shall I dare to take up your valuable time, by coming to consult you, as I should have done, if you had been a stranger. Oh, Frank! Why do you turn out to be yourself?"

She speaks in a half playful strain, for she dare not trust herself to be serious with Frank. But he cannot respond to her well-meant attempt: "For Heaven's sake let us have this link at least," he says; "my life is barren of every interest save this. May neither cares nor feigns to care for me——"

"Do you care or 'feign' (the most you men do, I think) to care for her, may I ask?" Kate interrupts, hotly. "Frank! do I find you complaining to me of a wife to whom you haven't been wedded three months? We will be editor and contributor if you like, but cousins! friends! never again."

CHAPTER V.

KATE'S STORY.

"In case the need may arise of my consulting you in the progress of the story, you must let me come and see you?" Frank pleads; after some of the official preliminaries have been stiffly settled.

"In case that need should arise, write to me as you would to any other contributor, and I will come to the office, which is the proper place for all business transactions to take place in, I have always understood, Mr. Forest."

She speaks in a quiet, restrained tone; there is no trace of agitation or wounded feeling, or confusion, or resentment of any sort in her face. But she calls him "Mr."—a sure sign that she desires to sting him into remembering how different all things were

between them in the days when she called him "Frank."

"You will not even receive me at your house?" he asks, sadly. "Kate, you are bitter, indeed."

"Would your wife receive me at her house?" she asks. "Believe me, though, I am not bitter; still I have a strong sense of what is fitting, and it would not be fitting that you should come to my lodgings—house, I have none."

"You in lodgings alone," he mutters pitifully. "Kate, I can't stand it; I must speak to my mother and get her to induce you to alter your determination. If you were living with my mother and sisters, my wife would not dare——"

He pauses abruptly, for a strange look has come into Kate's face.

"I am not going to live alone," she says. "That is the reason; that, at least, is one of the reasons why I don't wish you to come and see me."

She looks sadly away from him and gazes

into space, for she is thinking that her resolve to meet the blast with Mrs. Angerstein, and protect the latter from it to the best of her ability, would meet with but small favour in the eyes of her aunt and cousins.

"You are not going to live alone? What do you mean?"

He asks the question sharply, and Kate feels the blood rising into her face as she recognizes the tone of masterful interrogation, which he certainly has no right to assume towards her any longer.

"My friend's name can be of no importance to you. We have made up our minds to our course; and, possibly, if I told you the circumstances, you might attempt to turn me from my portion of it. The attempt would be a vain one; nevertheless, I would rather spare you the trouble of making, and myself the trouble of resisting, it. I begin, then, in the next number," she continues in as matter-of-fact a way as if the conversation had never swerved from "The Unwarrantable" and its possible contents.

"You begin in the next number," he replies; then he hesitates, for an awkward question has arisen in his mind, an awkward doubt has suggested itself to him; and, if it has not suggested itself to her also, he fears that his mention of it may gall her more than he has had occasion to gall her already. He dare not say, "Do you mean to write under your own name in future?" for, with womanly perversity, she may say "yes," and for her to appear under her own name in his magazine would be an impossibility.

"You have forgotten to tell me your *nom de plume*," he begins. "Hitherto, your articles have been unsigned."

"My *nom de plume?*"

"Yes; it is necessary that I should know it, in order that the MS. may have immediate attention."

"I had not thought of one; I had forgotten that my real name would be a stain on your pages. 'Outcast' will do as well as anything else, won't it?"

"Kate," he says, reproachfully; "you're

hardening yourself most unjustly against me. How would it look to—to—all our people, if you, keeping aloof from all of them, as you're intending to do, were to appear under your own name in my magazine? We should be suspected of holding intercourse, which you will not permit, and of being on terms of intimacy with each other which do not exist. I should not be justified in letting you put yourself in such a false position, without pointing out the consequences to you."

"The consequences to me would be very immaterial; but you're perfectly justified in protecting yourself from the unpleasantness that would assail you, if it were known that you were commonly humane to me. Attach what signature you please to my writings; I shall not suggest any other than the one I have suggested: for that I am."

She turns to go now, and a clerk knocks for admission on business of importance, and, altogether, Frank feels that the miserable

end of the miserable interview has come. Coldly, without even shaking hands, these two part; and she goes back to her lodgings with the sore feeling that her chief interest in the future will be to make those lodgings as much like a comfortable home as she can for poor, incapable Cissy.

For she is not fired with any of the burning glow of literary ambition. She has taken up the life without a particle of enthusiasm, simply as a means of bread-winning. She is fully alive to the consciousness that even if she has a brief success, or apparent success, through this accident which has made Frank editor of the new magazine, she may speedily make a dead failure, and be compelled to renounce the pen she has taken up in such cold blood. She is fully alive, also, to the fact that even should she continue sufficiently successful to be altogether committed to the career, that it will be one of never-ending anxiety, of painful hope, and despair, and disappointment. All this she knows, and all this

she accepts with almost stoical indifference. What breaks her down, and wrings scalding tears from her eyes, is the thought that Frank either fears his wife so much, or loves her so well, as to shrink from the peril of his cousin's name appearing in conjunction with his own in print.

Like a woman, she will not in her first rage recognize the fact that it is fear for her good name which makes him desire that it should not be brought forward in a quarter where it would be attacked so insidiously that he would be powerless to defend it. Like a woman, she thinks that he is ashamed now of everything connected with her, because he dare not publicly vaunt anything like regard for her—ashamed of his relationship, ashamed of his former love, of his cruelly given and equally cruelly taken away love—ashamed even of his standing towards her in a position that any stranger, who had edited the paper, might adopt. "He is a slave, either to his fear or his love," she repeats bitterly, as a vision of

May regnant in his heart rises up before her. Nevertheless, though, as has been said, she does not enter upon her new life with enthusiasm, she does enter upon it with something that is considerably better than enthusiasm in the long run, and that is, with a steadfast determination to work as well as she can, and as hard as she can, though she has no abstract love for the unknown work as yet. Ploughing the well-tilled fields of literature may not be pleasant work, but she will put her hand to the plough heartily, and if success come, "Well, all the better for Mrs. Angerstein," she thinks, drearily.

Time passes. The two forlorn women who have been drawn together by misfortune, by the helplessness of the one, and the helpfulness of the other, are settled in their lodgings, and Kate's work has begun to be public property.

The majority of women's first novels are little more than a *resumé* of their own experiences, slightly garbled, and thinly

veiled. Kate's is no exception to the rule. Her heroine has two heroes. So has she! Her heroine has to pay a sharp penalty for a fault she never committed, and for a folly which she never contemplated. Her heroine has to a most marked degree an aversion which amounts to an antipathy to the type of woman of whom Mrs. Frank Forest is a representative—the women who are simply amiable, and gentle, when all things go exactly according to their ideas of what is well, and who sting like scorpions, and scratch like cats, as soon as anything runs counter to their imperfectly developed inclinations.

The two Miss Forests, taking their customary good-naturedly lazy interest in all that concerns their brother, read his magazine with just that amount of attention which will enable them to talk about it without making blunders. Gertrude reads Kate's story, as most serial stories are read by the majority of serial story readers. That is to say, she picks out all the incidents,

all the descriptions of pretty and agreeable persons, all the little bits of interview that apparently emanate from the heart. Need it be added that she skips all the delicate delineations of character, all the subtle allusions to various idiosyncracies that are well known to all the members of the Forest family, and all the cautiously veiled hits at May which Kate has dealt out unconsciously; consequently Gertrude puts "The Unwarrantable" down, with no other comment on the story it contains than the words—

"'A new story, by a new writer.' How tired I am of that special form of attracting attention. Frank should have struck out something fresh. It's only human to shrink from the prospect of another 'new writer;' he or she is probably young, and may be endowed with a power of pouring out his or her platitudes for the remainder of the natural term of our lives."

"Let me have a look at the cause of this genuine burst of feeling, and rather involved sentence," Marian says, stretching out her

hand for the journal. Then she glances down the first pages, and her carelessness vanishes, and she settles herself to the reading of the first chapter with attention.

"Kate stands confessed in every line," she says to herself, when she has finished it. "What does all this mean? writing for Frank, and keeping away from us. Surely if May is not blind, and stupid to a degree that exceeds the stupidity even of a Constable, she will see herself in that passage commencing with the quotation, 'No ass so meek, no ass so obstinate.' Oh, Kate! Kate! you shouldn't have quoted your darling Pope so aptly, if you wanted to remain undiscovered in Frank's magazine."

There is, a few days after this, a gathering of the clans at Frank's house. Marian has kept her own counsel, and has not breathed a word of her shrewd conjecture to any one, but she goes with a quickened interest to her sister-in-law's dinner party to-night, for she knows that the new magazine and its contents must inevitably be discussed.

May, aided by an admirable cook and housekeeper, by her mother's hints, and a capital cookery book, achieves a genuine success as a dinner-giver. No napery is whiter, no silver brighter, no glass more highly polished than young Mrs. Forest's. From early mŏrn to dewy eve May is on household cares intent; and she finds her Heaven below in the work. She has passed out of the stage of even trying to delude herself into the belief that she loves her husband, just as he has passed out of the stage of attempting to delude other people into the belief that he has the faintest feeling of affection for his wife. Yet, odd as it may appear, they are not unhappy or even dissatisfied. They have got what they respectively bargained for in the recesses of their souls. He has all the solid comforts, all the inspiring luxuries, all the consideration which money gives to and gains for a man. She has the position and independence of a married woman whose money is her own to spend. Some women "to plea-

sure or to business take," under these circumstances. They seek distraction in love or literature. May does neither; she turns, happily for herself and Frank, to housekeeping, and the result is that everything is excellently ordered.

This occupation, which is the chief interest of her life, and the dearest object of her heart, prevents her missing her husband at all during his long daily absences. "The Unwarrantable" is indeed a boon to him. According to himself, all his time, all his energies, all his interests must be devoted to that scape-goat. The beautifully-appointed house on Campden Hill never sees its master unless its master is surrounded by friends. At the end of five months' wedlock, the husband and wife feel called upon to talk polite conversation if they find themselves together without the saving presence of a third person. Nevertheless, it must be repeated, that they are satisfied with their lives, and that they do not loathe the links that bind them together. Only one passion

will rouse them from their torpor of indifference, and that one passion has not been roused yet. With all the undeveloped elements of jealousy in her nature, May has been given no cause for the raising of the demon. Even she acknowledges—and is glad to acknowledge—that "The Unwarrantable" has a mighty claim on its editor's time. "It saves me so much trouble Frank being out so much," she says to her bosom friends. "A man about the house all day would interfere with the household routine most terribly, and I like everything to go like clock-work." So she patronizes "The Unwarrantable," and Frank's engrossed care of it, and is thankful—and so is he.

But to-night she feels outside the conversation when it turns upon the magazine, and she is vivaciously annoyed when she finds that other women—especially Frank's sisters—know more about it than she does. Accordingly she turns a keen though not a delighted ear to the conversation, when "The Unwarrantable" comes upon the carpet.

"I don't like your leading novelist," one man says.

"If ever a woman went vaguely into a maze, trusting to her heart and intuition, rather than to her head, to lead her out of it, your 'new writer' is doing it, Forest. Do you think she'll ever do any good, Frank, or will she fall short, and come to grief?"

"You take it for granted it's a woman," Frank says, rather savagely; "is there a man among us who can write better——"

"Or worse," his friend interrupts, with a laugh; "Mrs. Forest, I appeal to you."

"That would be a case of 'woman against woman,' and monstrously unfair," Marian interrupts.

"Why blend your voice and fortunes with the failing cause?" the dowager Mrs. Forest cuts in, euphoniously. "If the novel does not hurt the magazine, does it matter by whom it is written?" She asks her question with superb disdain. She appeals with elegantly uplifted hands to the company

assembled, for corroboration of her testimony. She carries every one with her by her grace and her *grande dame* air—every one but her daughter Marian, who is near to her and murmurs—

"Don't say a word more, mamma, until you have seen Kate; she is writing that story."

"Kate!"

Mrs. Forest ejaculates her niece's name in tones of surprise, shock, pride, and bewilderment. She does not regulate those tones at all, and they fall upon May's ears. May is up in arms at once.

"There is no 'Kate' here, happily," she says languidly, but rather viciously withal; "but perhaps you're beginning an acting charade; I am not good at those things myself, and, besides, I should never like to take a part in anything in which the name of 'Kate' occurred. I have been so horribly taken in by a 'Kate,'" she continues to explain down the whole length of her dinner-table, "that I shrink now from any one who

bears the name; and my husband bears me out in my judgment, for he has never seen the person who deceived me, since I found out that she did deceive me; have you Frank?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE CRUEL TRUTH.

KATE'S windows in the house in one of the verdure-clad Bayswater roads are bright with flowers, even in mid-winter. In spring it is needless to say they bloom into most softly coloured and harmonized beauty. She is quite remarkable for her masses of snow-drops, her lemon tinted tulips, and delicately pencilled crocuses; her clumps of Russian violets, and great waxy-headed pale pink, and blue, and buff hyacinths. She is also quite remarkable for her tender, loving care of the same, and for her jealous guardianship of each leaf and bloom from contact with any other hand than her own.

Mrs. Angerstein has made futile, feeble efforts at watering and pruning Kate's pets

once or twice, but Kate has suppressed all these efforts.

"They are the only things that are altogether my own," she says. "My family have cut me, my dog is dead, and my cat has strayed away. Leave me my flowers; let me feel that they lift up their heads and recognize me as their only friend. You have your children; I have nothing else."

"My dear, I thought to save you trouble," Mrs. Angerstein responds. "One would imagine you had a sentiment about them; that they were the gift of a lover, instead of being ordered in from the nurseryman's round the corner."

Candid as Kate is in most things, she does not think it necessary to tell Mrs. Angerstein that her "only friends" are the gift of Captain Bellairs; that they have been transplanted from his place in the country—the place to which, when the time is ripe, he hopes to transplant Kate; and that in lavishing love and care on them, Kate feels

almost as if she were bringing herself nearer to the donor.

Kate has stoutly backed up Mrs. Angerstein in the latter's determination not to accept an income from Captain Bellairs.

"I have enough for both; I am making more money than I can spend on myself," Kate says, with the unconscious egotism and self-confidence of an author who has still to execute her first failure. "I'm as proud for Cissy as I would be for myself, and, with my consent, she shall not live on any man's bounty. You know, better than I can tell you, what would be said if she did—what would be said of her and thought of you," Kate says when he moots the subject.

"Do you care about what is thought of me, Kate?" he says. "You have thought badly enough of me in days gone by. Have I redeemed myself in your eyes?"

She looks up at him, and there is a truthful, earnest look of desire for her good opinion in his eyes. With all a woman's perspicuity she reads clearly that he loves

her better now than he did in those days in Torquay. But still she dare not unbend, for she distrusts herself.

"How base I have been," she thinks, self-reproachfully; "I'd have taken Frank away from May without compunction, I loved him so well. Shall I ever dare to let myself think that I can go back and take up the original feeling for Harry Bellairs, and try to teach myself that it is a good and true one?"

She turns questioningly to him, as she thinks this; in her candour she is about to state the case to him, and leave it to his judgment. But as she hesitates, the opportunity is lost. Cissy comes in, with her garb of widowhood on, truly, but with no other sign of widowhood about her, for she is smiling, radiant, perfectly satisfied that he is waiting here for her, and merely putting up with Kate in the meantime.

"Kate," she begins, with a little effort at addressing her communication to Kate only, though she inclines her head towards

Captain Bellairs as she speaks, and gives him her hand in silent salutation. "Kate, the system of treating me like a baby or a fool has been carried on by his lawyer even after my husband's death. I am not the helpless dependant on your bounty that you —that we all thought I was. No other will can be found, and I and my children come in for everything, as next of kin, or something of that sort." Cissy adds vaguely, "And I have been kept in the dark all this time, even while things have been settling themselves in my favour, by the brutality of my brother-in-law."

"To say nothing of the time-serving spirit of your husband's lawyer," Bellairs says coldly. There is an exaltation about Cissy, a forgetfulness of all that she owes to someone else who is present, which chills his warm Irish heart, and fires his hot Irish spirit.

"He knew that I should be all right in the end, you see, Harry," the widow explains eagerly; "he didn't mean it as a slur

on me, as his odious family said he did; but after all,"—and here her face falls suddenly —"his income died with him, and it's a barren honour that he has paid me, in letting everything just drift in my direction. There is the house and the furniture (that woman will never enjoy either, thank goodness), and the interest of two thousand pounds; is that much? Can I live on it, Kate? it might almost as well have been nothing as what it is," the complaining bereaved one goes on, before Kate has words at command with which to make answer. "I couldn't get up a spark of gratitude for it under any circumstances, even if I tried, and with the family waiting expectantly for me to express gratitude for what was only passive and limp justice towards me after all; I won't try. How could he dare"—she goes on, quivering with anger now—"how could he dare to let me live as I did, and then to die as he did without providing for what has become necessity to me and my children?"

"I leave you to talk to Captain Bellairs about it," Kate says, speaking awkwardly for the first time in her life; "men are much better advisers than women are, Cissy dear; I'll go and see about ordering supper, and you'll stay and have some with us, won't you?" she adds, suddenly turning to Bellairs, who is only praying that he may be able to detain her to mount guard over the coming interview between himself and Cissy.

"I am only too happy to stay near you under any circumstances; you know that well enough," he says to Miss Mervyn; "but can't you let the supper order itself for once, and stay and hear a more coherent statement of the good news than Cissy has yet given us? Tell it over again, Cissy," he says, with a laugh that is painfully strained and exaggerated.

"The good news," she replies with a sigh, "is only that I am less unjustly treated than I thought I was; but it won't sound very well in the ears of a successful writer,

nor in the ears of a man who puts everything in the scale against that successful writer now, and finds everything wanting," she winds up with; and there is a degree of vicious determination about Cissy that staggers her nearest friends, who are only accustomed to her limper and more amiable manner.

"I will stay and hear anything that either of you may be pleased to say," Kate says, in answer to that last remark which Captain Bellairs has made. Then she sits down under a reproachful battery of glances from Cissy.

But the burden of being in another woman's way is too heavy a one for Kate to bear patiently for any long space of time. It occurs to her, also, that it is probably only the natural duplicity of man which is causing Captain Bellairs to portray satisfaction in her society. "Cissy, at least, is honest in the matter, she shows me plainly enough that she wishes me to begone," Kate says to herself; and in a spasm of ill-founded

jealousy and annoyance she rises up, and once more declares that there exists some strong household reason for her presence elsewhere.

"The shops will be closed presently, and there are several things that I must get for to-morrow. To-morrow is a Bank holiday, you ought to remember; all shopping must be done to-night," she argues, when Captain Bellairs protests against her going out at this hour.

"At least, if you must go you must allow me to escort you," he pleads.

"No, no, no! the necessity for an escort belongs to my past life, not to my present; besides, I should make bad and unprofitable bargains, if I felt that you were standing about, waiting impatiently for the bargaining to be over. You must let me go, and you must let me go alone."

"Kate has a great knack of seeming to be perpetually sacrificing herself," Cissy says, complainingly, as Kate goes out of the room.

"Now I never knew any one who liked less to play the part of social martyr," Bellairs says, quickly, as he recalls a thousand acts of unappreciated self-abnegation on Kate's part. Perhaps even Bellairs does not realize the extent of the one she is making now in leaving him alone with the widow, who, weak in all else, is strong in her flattering fondness for Bellairs himself.

"I don't know how you can say that conscientiously," Mrs. Angerstein goes on, with an aggravating air of putting it to his sense of justice; "whenever either of us asks her to stay in the room with us, or to go out with us, she tells us that stern duty compels her to do something else, and the something else always sounds as if it were disagreeable; but she will go on doing her duty, disagreeable as it may be. She doesn't say this in so many words, but she implies it, and I would almost rather a person made herself unpleasant straight-forwardly than in a roundabout way; you men are so easily wheedled." Mrs. Angerstein winds up with

a little laughing toss of her head. "Kate is very good in one respect, though; I am sure if I were as clever as she is, and as beautiful as she is, I'd have made you care ten thousand times more for me than you do for her."

"Perhaps you, like Miss Mervyn, would never have cared to try," he says, carelessly; "but we're drifting into a very idle vein of conversation, Cissy; talk about love-making between us is simply absurd. Brothers and sisters speak sterner stuff."

"We're not brother and sister," she says, meekly; "still I agree with you. Shall I have the children down to see you?" she asks, with a fervent hope in her heart that he will say "no," for she does prize this tête-a-tête with him very highly, unsatisfactory as it has been so far as it has gone.

"Yes, certainly, if they're not gone to bed," he says, leaping at the suggestion gladly, and making for the bell before Cissy has time to change her mind, and declare

it to be an untimely disturbance of her children.

"I don't have them down here very often," she begins explaining. "You see I have not had a proper person to look after them, and Kate says they disturb her when she's writing if they're playing about the room; or, at least, if she doesn't say it, she looks as if she thought it, and so, as I can't bear the idea of my poor darlings being in anybody's way, I keep them in their own room nearly always when they're not at school."

"Poor Kate! she has need of the conditions of perfect, undisturbed quiet and solitude, for she works very hard in these days," Captain Bellairs says, ignoring the tone of complaint which Cissy has infused into her remark.

"Yes; I have been most unfortunate in interfering with the peace and solitude that are essential to her writing," Mrs. Angerstein says resignedly.

"She has never allowed you to feel any-

thing approaching to being in her way; I am sure of that," Captain Bellairs interrupts hurriedly; "Kate is the soul of generosity."

He speaks warmly and reprovingly; his thought is evidently more for Kate than for Cissy, and Cissy cannot forbear showing that she feels that it is so.

"I believe you love her, Harry," she says, in a voice that is scarcely above a whisper.

"You surely love her yourself? Are we not all fond of her?" he says, equivocating, in the embarrassment which every man feels when openly charged with having fallen a prey to the tender passion.

"I am very grateful to her," Cissy says, hardly; not that she is hard in reality, but it is a blow to all her dearest hopes, to find that he loves another woman so well that he is unable even to attempt to deny the fact. "I am very grateful to her," she repeats; "but Harry, I should feel, oh! so infinitely more at peace, if I thought that I should never see either her or you again."

"Until seeing me again will give you the

same happiness that the sight of a brother would give you, Cissy, I will not intrude on you," he says, rising up; then he gives the woman, who is rapidly breaking down, a few parting words of advice:—

"But let me ask you one last favour, and grant it to me, for your own sake, and your children's, and for the sake of the affection I have for you; don't cast yourself adrift from the truest, the warmest, and the best woman friend you have."

"The last! then is this good-bye?" she asks in bewilderment.

"Yes—until you recall me as a brother," he says. Then he shakes her hand, with a quiet kindness that nearly kills her, and goes away.

She stands where he left her, for a long time, her tear-stained face buried in her hands. She recalls with piteous fidelity every incident of her life with which he has had any connection. "Always good, generous, and true, and always cold to me," she thinks; "but he never chilled my life

until I found him lying half dead on Barnes Common. Blankness! I never knew what utter blankness was till to-night."

She tries to stir herself back into animation, by telling herself that she has her children still, her three clever, beautiful, loving children; and then, with a hopeless gasp, she bethinks herself that when they cease to be pets and playthings, they will go out into the world, and find other loves, and other interests, and leave her behind alone!

"Alone, always alone, from this time till the end comes," the weak, unhappy woman whispers; "for as for staying to see her happiness—Oh! Harry, that is the most cruel suggestion you ever made to living thing."

CHAPTER VII.

SWEET GRATITUDE!

KATE MERVYN being one of the few women who know exactly what they want when they enter a shop, finishes her marketing long before it will be discreet on her part to return home and interrupt the tête-a-tête. "Cissy shall have her chance, and I'd pray for her success if I thought she would make him happy," the girl thinks, in a burst of generous fervour. At the same time pangs of doubt and fear assail her. She may be doing wrong even in being passive. Cissy is too small a creature mentally to make Captain Bellairs really happy in the highest way. Still "one can't volunteer to be a man's guardian angel," Kate tells herself, with a sad laugh, as she turns out of the

noisy shop-lined streets and saunters away up among the shady, sweet flower-perfumed groves that intersect the Campden Hill district.

One house specially attracts her regard as she passes along. The tender pale green leaves and tendrils of a Virginian-creeper wreathe themselves all over the front of the house, and hang down in festoons over the balcony. A pale, soft light shines through the drawing-room window, the refined, delicate light of an Argand lamp, which does not contrast coarsely even with the silvery moonbeams. The pure perfume of flowers steals gently down, and lures Kate into pausing and looking more intently at the pretty softly lighted and sweetly scented house. Three ladies are sitting out on the balcony. One of them in white presently rises and leans over the balcony, and speaks a few words in a languid tone to her companions. As she does this, the filmiest of filmy clouds passes away from the surface of the moon, and Kate recognizes the wife,

and mother-in-law and sister-in-law of her cousin Frank.

She stands still, spell-bound, with no desire to hear what they are talking about, but with a queer sensation of utter inability to move away.

"So this is the way brides spend their evenings in these days, is it?" Mrs. Grange says satirically.

"Oh! he's at home quite enough for my happiness, I assure you," May replies indifferently; "it is such a tax on one to have to listen evening after evening to the talk on the everlasting subject of his own compositions—'my magazine,' and 'my plays'—I shudder at the mere sound of them."

"You told me you fell in love with Frank because he was clever, if you remember," Mrs. Grange says; and Mrs. Constable takes up the parable—

"Cleverness is a great snare unless the mind is well regulated; and I am sorry to say that Frank's is not a well-regulated mind. A man who can't find his happiness

at home in such a house as this, and with such a wife as our May, must be in a state of most pernicious false excitement. I am sure I pity May; I pity her most deeply."

May looks round in surprise.

"What on earth for, mamma?" she asks. "I'm very happy; it would worry me dreadfully to have Frank about me more than he is. We get on very well; I am quite as happy as I ever expected to be."

"You certainly had no very exalted expectations about happiness then, when you married," Mrs. Grange says. "I wonder if Frank expected more."

"Why no; how could he?" May asks in wonder, and Mrs. Constable chimes in—

"More indeed! I should think not; it's a case of his getting all and giving nothing, to my mind. Ah! when I think of how well May might have done, I blame myself for the scruples I had about inducing her to break the engagement."

"And I'm sure I had every excuse, the very fairest excuse for doing it," May pouts;

"when all that came out about that horrid cousin of his who disgraced herself so, no one could have blamed me if I had broken it off on that account——"

"But as it happens, you clung to it," Mrs. Grange interrupts sharply. "Come, May, be just! Frank gave you every opportunity of breaking it off; be fair, don't speak of him now as if he coerced you into the marriage."

All this time (it is only a minute or two, for the speakers have caught the cue from one another very quickly), Kate has been standing in a sort of non-comprehending stupor. The words fall upon her ears, but their meaning is but vague to her. She is only keenly conscious of one thing, and that is that she is being guilty of the mean sin of eaves-dropping, and that she is physically incapable of moving away, for her feet are like lead and her head is swimming.

But the dread that Frank may come home at any moment, and find her, nerves her to the task of making the effort to move

on. It has been said that the meaning of the words that have been uttered has been vague to her, nevertheless she has taken in their meaning fully enough to understand that her poor cousin has made a bitter bad bargain in marrying his innocent and wealthy May. The passionate love for him that was born of gratified vanity, and her intense appreciation of his intellectual powers, is dead, but Kate is not one wit ashamed of the fact of its having lived and flourished freely once. So now, though that love is dead, the good old cousinly affection, that has more sentiment in it but not less sincerity than is in the love a sister bestows on a brother, rises up fresh and vigorous now, as she hears him spoken of, by those of his own house, as a man who has been bought with far too heavy a price.

"Perhaps she taunts and stings him about me," Kate thinks with a sob; "and the poor boy thinks me so far to blame that he can't defy her, or deny her charge. Oh! the errors and follies of my youth! My wild

love of excitement and easily-taken fancy, my unchecked freedom, and unrestricted reliance on myself; what misery it all has brought upon me, and unfortunately not on me only!"

She is inclined to denounce herself, to declare herself to be one of the unworthiest of the unworthy, as she goes along softly, slowly, sadly on her homeward path. She feels herself to be guilty of a rank offence against her aunt and cousins, in that she has unwittingly been the means of their having to bow the head before the Constable faction. "Poor Aunt Marian!" she thinks, in a burst of loving, self-reproachful rage and pity; "her boy is so dear to her, and so like herself, that it must be a living death to her to see him patronized, and tolerated, and treated as one to whom the Constables have done great honour."

A yearning to go to her Aunt Marian and tell all the truth of the story out of which the scandal that stains her life has grown, comes over her; but with the yearning is

mingled a sickening doubt as to the probability of her tale being credited. "If they looked doubtful, or took me back under the shadow of the family roof-tree on sufferance, it would be the death of the little hope that is left to me. No, I must battle on alone, with the knowledge that the mud that has been thrown will stick to the last, unless I make such a name for myself as will make them find out that the mud has been thrown undeservedly."

She is not in a mood to combat trifling difficulties to-night. A great disaster would rouse her energies, and she would prove equal to the task of facing and fighting it. A roaring lion in her path would recall the dormant love of life for dear life's sake; but gnat-stings make her weary of the existence that seems to be full of them at present. Accordingly, she drags her weary, tired, overstrained body and mind home this night, in hopes of silence, peace—nothing more!

Peace flies affrighted the instant Kate

catches sight of Mrs. Angerstein, who is crouching on the sofa, crying in the effortless way which may continue for many hours.

"Is it joy, or is it pain, or is it both together?" Kate says; making a strong struggle to be cheerful and unconstrained. "My dear Cissy, this is simply the reaction of feeling after the long strain and anxiety. You'll feel accustomed to being a lucky woman by to-morrow morning."

Kate feels herself that her manner is that of a falsely-sanguine person, and that she is making manifest her dread that some other trouble has overtaken her friend than the one she is affecting to assuage. The hand which she places on Cissy's shoulder trembles, the would-be encouraging tones falter; she almost feels guilty of deceit, in having professed to think that Cissy was weeping over her good luck.

Mrs. Angerstein lifts her face up from the cushion, and holds it, tear-stained and wistful, towards Kate.

"Kiss me," she says, brokenly. "I have been hating you so; but, now you're near me again, I can't do it. Lucky! Never call me that again, Kate; I've heard the truth to-night, and I wish—oh!. how I wish it had killed me outright instead of only mangling me. He never loved me; I must say that he never professed to do it, but I always thought that he was concealing his feelings."

"Men don't do that when it gives them the smallest pleasure to betray them," Kate says thoughtfully.

"You're despising me, I suppose, for my folly in having given away my heart without its having been asked for," Cissy says, half testily, half in self-humiliation.

"No; not that, very far from that; 'like Dian's kiss, unasked, unsought, love gives itself, and is not bought,' you know. I like you for not loving to order, and I like you for the courage that impels you to confess that your love is not returned, and that it was never won under false pretences. Many

women, who wouldn't utter a lie on any other subject, to save their lives, lie on this; they will declare that they have been the sought, when they have been the seekers."

Mrs. Angerstein straightens herself, both morally and physically, to a slight degree. There is more than a grain of comfort to her in Kate's declaration of compassionate sympathy and approbation.

"Has Harry Bellairs ever sought you?" she asks, eagerly; and Kate answers, slowly,

"Yes; as much as I sought him in the old days when I knew him first."

"Kate! you acknowledge that you sought him?"

"Yes!" Kate cries out vigorously. "Was it not seeking him, to let him whisper words of love unchecked? Was it not seeking him, to do violence to the tact which teaches us that we ought not to distinguish the individual from the multitude? I have done these things, Cissy——"

"Then I think your conduct must have

been highly indecorous," Cissy says, rigidly, forgetful for a moment of herself and her own short-comings, of which Kate is too generous to remind her. "Now with me," she adds, with a whimper, "the thing was different; I was led into it by his brotherly affection and devotion; I would never have betrayed myself else—I wouldn't have been so unwomanly as you seem to have been."

Kate's eyes open wider and wider in startled surprise. In the humility which has been born of her deep sense of those deficiencies in her conduct which may have a depreciatory effect, not only on her own life, but on the lives of her kin, she has put herself in the wrong place by telling the truth boldly to this woman, who cannot discriminate. But pained as she is, mortified as she is, she will not attempt to right herself by dragging the man's name into the discussion, or the man's share of the fault and the folly into the transaction.

"To be 'unwomanly,' is to be suspicious and calculating, cold and perpetually on

guard," she says, trying to turn the conversation, lightly; "I am sorry you think I have been that."

"You can twist my accusation round your tongue, and bring it out as a compliment," Cissy says, angrily; "you can talk me into liking you, whenever you like, though I do hate you sometimes for having talked him into loving you."

"And does he?" Kate answers dreamily, making a faint exertion to save herself from taking even this sweet probability on trust.

"He says he does; but he's an Irishman, who will say anything to get himself out of one difficulty, even if the saying it gets him into another," Mrs. Angerstein murmurs, half in grief, half in appeal. "Kate! I am your friend, though—though I have told you truths that some friends would shrink from telling you; if he were in his first ardour I would be the first to say, 'Risk everything and marry him, and make the best of it;' but he has loved you off and on for years; he has found out that he

can love you dearly when he sees you, and do without you very well when he doesn't see you. You'd be crushed by indifference more than by cruelty now, wouldn't you? and a man who has found out that he gets on just as well without her as with her, soon gets indifferent to a wife."

"Don't forestall possibilities, and don't caution me to avoid a form of misery that may never be within my grasp," Kate says. "Make yourself happy; you have lost him, you tell me, but I have not won him. I am as alone in the world as you are, Cissy; more so, for you have the future interests of your children to look forward to——"

"And they'll leave me the instant they get interests of their own," the selfish mother cries; "what is the use of my depending upon them for a few brief years of happiness before everything ends? misfortune has tracked me from my birth, and I can't try to combat it any longer!"

"Misfortune met me cordially when I made a fool of myself, and twisted oppor-

tunity and intellect, and every other good gift, to my own idea of what was pleasant and good for me," Kate responds; "but after all, misfortune is like a nettle: grasp it hardly and it cannot sting; say, 'I know the worst, I can brave the worst, the worst can't hurt me more than I have been hurt already,' and what can fortune or misfortune do?"

"Let you quite alone, to perish," Cissy says, with a prophetic insight into truth, that has never been granted to her before.

"Let you quite alone, to begin again," Kate cries, heartily; "to begin again, to begin again! I declare I believe it would pull me back from the gates of death, if I were in extremity, that thought, that if I lived I could begin again!"

Mrs. Angerstein's head waggles in astonishment as Kate speaks. The idea of being willing, not to say eager, to recommence a life of toil, of trouble, of difficulty and degradation, staggers Cissy out of all the small reasoning powers with which a beneficent Providence had originally gifted her.

"I wouldn't 'begin again' for worlds, unless I thought it would all be made much easier to me," she mutters, presently; and Kate says, with an air of conviction that surprises herself even—

"Wouldn't you? I would, for I should pray so heartily that if I might be given the chance, the strength to use it better might be accorded me," she says very humbly; and Cissy thinks—

"This woman has sinned and never been found out; she's much worse than I am, and her conscience is pricking her, and I'm glad of it!" Aloud she says—

"You are so candid, Kate; you say the worst of yourself, because I suppose you think people will think the better of you; but it's a mistake, my dear; whatever you tell, the world will always think there's something left untold; of course, I am bound to believe you——"

"You are not," Kate cuts in incisively. "You're either feeling or feigning distrust; from this moment, innocent or guilty, I will

never attempt to act as champion for myself. Cissy, the world has been hard on us both."

"But not so hard but that it may be harder still," Mrs. Angerstein says, drawing herself up. "Thank you for all you have done. I hope to repay you in time; but I dare not risk my children's future and my own reputation, by mixing myself up with any one who is not well authenticated any longer. I can do you no good. You may do me much harm; it's cruel to force me to say it, when you could have said it better."

CHAPTER VIII.

"MY ONLY HOPE."

"WHAT a divided family we seem to be now," Mrs. Forest says rather sadly to her two daughters, as Marian brings her reading of a brief notice of one of Frank's new pieces to a conclusion. "We don't even know when Frank has a new play out, until we see a notice of the fact in the papers."

"He might have the civility to send us stalls for the first night," Gertrude grumbles; "probably he gave them to that dreadful Mrs. Grange. May would take care of that, though the Constable is not born yet who can appreciate Frank's comedies."

"I wish you would go and see your brother oftener than you do," Mrs. Forest

says, with a little thrill in her voice. "My poor boy! he seems to be drifting away from his own people, and I am sure that it's not because he is so happy with his wife's family."

"It's easy enough to say, 'go there oftener,'" Marian answers; "but it's an uncommonly difficult thing to do. Frank has the air of a man who is a visitor in his own house, and May is so full of the knowledge that the house, the furniture, and the money are all her own, that I hardly dare breathe in her atmosphere, for fear it may cost Frank something when we are gone."

"Bear the unpleasantness for your brother's sake," Mrs. Forest says, and there are actually tears in her eyes as she says it. Her pride is deeply hurt by the subordinate position her son has been compelled to take up in his own household. But her affection is more deeply wounded still, for her maternal instincts tell her that her boy is not happy, and she feels with sorrow that in his unhappiness he does not turn to her.

"Kate lost to us altogether, and Frank estranged from us," she says plaintively; "do let us make an effort to avert this last misery," she goes on with energy; "go and see them to-day; take it for granted that they are both glad to see you, and treat May so cordially, that she will confide in you, if she fancies she has any cause of complaint against Frank."

"Defend me from having to listen to May's fancies," Gertrude says, shrugging her shoulders.

"And defend me from falling into such depths of mean-spiritedness as to allow a Constable under any circumstances to utter a word against Frank," Marian laughs. "Mamma, I believe you are only raising bogies. Frank is devoting all his time and attention to the magazine very properly."

"I never see it anywhere," Mrs. Forest says; "I hope he is making a good thing of it. If I could know that he was making a good income independent of May, I should be happier."

"He told me, when I saw him last, that he meant to make it a great success," Gertrude puts in; "he was going to engage the best authors and artists at fabulous prices."

"And who is to pay them?"

"The proprietors, I suppose. Now, dear mamma, don't worry yourself, and throw up your hands in despair; the pleasure of paying does not devolve upon the editor."

"He told me he was part proprietor, as well as editor," Mrs. Forest says anxiously; "I do distrust these new ventures so thoroughly; and if Frank loses money, May will make him feel that it's not his own that he is losing."

"Yes; May has lost every atom of that silly softness that took him a little at first," Marian says, as quietly as if falling out of love with his wife were an every-day occurrence in the life of a man.

"I never felt more low-spirited about his prospects than I do now," Mrs. Forest says dejectedly; "he never tells me anything of his affairs, as he used to do—not that I ever

bought his confidence when I was his only banker," the mother continues, proudly, "he gave it to me freely—but now, if I even venture to dip beneath the surface, he only says, 'Don't worry yourself, mother, I'm all right,' and I know Frank well enough to feel sure that he is not all right, when he can say that."

"Mamma, you make me feel as if we were all on the brink of bankruptcy, or a general break-up of some sort," Marian laughs. "In order to regain my balance, I really will go and see May to-day; the sight of May, lapped in luxury, and looking rich and securely established as she always does, will restore me to my normal condition of faith in our all having enough to live upon."

In pursuance of this determination the two Misses Forest call on their brother's wife this day, and, for a wonder, find Frank at home. Nevertheless, though the whole atmosphere is redolent of wealth, Marian's spirit is not at all reassured, for Frank's soul seems to be

dark within him, and May has too much the air of one who believes herself to be wronged to be a pleasant hostess.

However, they all stroll about for awhile in the pretty, deceptive, well-shrubbed garden, which stretches itself behind the house; and the sisters try to feel that they are welcome, and the brother tries to delude himself into the belief that they think that they are so. They advert casually to the fact of their not having seen one another lately, and then Marian says—

"To tell the truth, our visit was to you, May, entirely, to-day; we expected to find that Frank had gone up to the office as usual."

The words are no sooner out of her mouth than she feels that she has made a mistake. Frank looks annoyed, and May looks triumphantly disagreeable, as fair, sweet, smiling, suave women can look when they fancy they have been wronged, and know that they have avenged themselves.

"Marian is surprised that you can tear

yourself from the magazine even for one day, Frank," the wife says with a little vicious emphasis.

"Is it going well, Frank?" Marian asks cheerfully. "I've seen it capitally noticed somewhere," she adds in her desire to say something pleasant about her brother's last hobby.

"Then you have been more fortunate than I have been," May answers quickly. "I see it called weak and a failure, in every paper I take up."

"You don't take up many, then," Frank says; "a failure it may prove eventually; but weak, no one with an ounce of brains can ever believe it to be."

"It's not the kind of magazine that I care to see on my table," May says virtuously; "it's so light and worldly. As my brother says, it's not literature at all; I am sorry, because it would look better if I had it about, wouldn't it?"

"Better for you, or for the magazine?" Marian asks promptly, for she is on her

mettle now, and her brother's wife will get no quarter from her, if that brother's wife deals a foul blow at Frank.

"For the magazine of course I mean," May simpers; "Frank can't expect me to do anything but condemn it, for it leads him into wasting money, and neglecting his other duties, and—I will say it, Frank—encouraging the audacity of a woman who ought not to be encouraged, and who dares to think she can write."

They are standing on the peaceful, well-cut greensward, under the sweeping branches of a weeping elm, as May brings her angry disclaimer to a conclusion, and waves the fiery cross aloft. The Forest girls are cool enough on the ordinary occasions of life; they neither show much feeling, nor do they conceal much. But they have the feeling of fidelity to the family well rooted in their hearts, and now, when they hear Kate scorned and Frank flouted, they cry "havoc! and let loose the dogs of war," upon Mrs. Frank Forest.

"You're not speaking of our cousin Kate, are you?" Marian asks hotly; "because if you are——"

"Don't force conclusions, Marian," Frank whispers hastily; "and for mercy's sake let the subject of that unlucky magazine alone; I'm in a hole about it, and I don't exactly see how I am to get out of it——"

He pauses, and Marian finds that her brother and herself have ebbed away from the others during this brief colloquy.

"It's a success?" she questions nervously, for in her heart she is very proud of this clever brother of hers, whose brains have always brought them renown hitherto. He shakes his head.

"Not a success, Frank! have done with it, then. My boy, you of all people can't afford to fail."

"My dear little sister, if I had a sou of my own I should succeed," he says, as he leans his arm over her shoulder; and Marian feels that he is all her own brother again, and that she can defy May the money-giver,

who never allows them to forget that she does give the money.

"'If' you had a sou of your own it would succeed; do you mean that, as you haven't the sou, it won't?"

"It's a venture—a scheme, you know; a thing that would pay for itself over and over again if plenty of pluck and money is put into it; but I'm cramped and fettered! May's money is all tied up so tightly that I can't touch it without going to her trustees and offering them explanations; moreover, I don't care to risk anything that isn't altogether my own."

"You feel there is a risk, then?"

"There is always a risk," he says evasively; and Marian gets nearer to him in the way she was wont to do in their old days of squabbling, and says—

"Out with it, Frank? are you free, or are you fettered? does 'The Unwarrantable' pay you sufficiently well to make you impervious to May's lax sympathy? for I see that she does not like it."

"'The Unwarrantable' will drag me into the slough of despond for a time, but I shall come out with gloriously burnished wings," he says, hopefully. "In the mean time I don't want to see a family feud established. We had better get on now, for May doesn't like to see a rival near the throne."

His sister paces along by his side in silence for a few moments; then she says—

"We're capital friends, aren't we, Frank? but even a friend can't ask you outright, 'What does it all mean?'"

"It means—look for yourself, Marian, and see what it means," he answers impatiently, as Mrs. Constable and Mrs. Grange drift down upon them, with an air of having the right to be there that is infinitely disagreeable to the Forests.

"Frank being the only gentleman of the party it's hardly fair of you to monopolize him so entirely," Mrs. Constable says, with a little mock air of badinage.

"Frank being my only brother, and I not having seen him for some weeks, it's hardly

a thing to be wondered at that I should like to have a few words with him quietly," Marian says, and she put her hand on her brother's arm as she speaks, and makes manifest that she does mean to stand on her rights, and not meekly lay her sword at the feet of the Constables.

"If I were May, I should have a sunk croquet ground made here," Mrs. Grange says, fussing about within the radius of a yard of them.

"It would spoil the lawn," Frank says sauvely. This matter of a sunk croquet ground has been mooted before, and he has expressed himself as averse to it. Rare shrubs are dotted about on the lawn, and at least a dozen of them would have to be sacrificed, if the sunk croquet ground is carried into effect.

"But if May cares more for croquet than she does for the lawn," Mrs. Grange begins pugnaciously, "it seems to me, as she has no one to please but herself, that she is foolish not to have it done."

"Frank cares more for the lawn than for croquet," Marian says quietly; and at this Mrs. Constable bristles up, and says,

"Under the circumstances, Frank can hardly object to May doing what she pleases with her own."

"She may sink the whole place as far as I'm concerned," Frank says bitterly; "the sooner the better too. I'm tired of being consulted, and, when I give an opinion, defied."

"What is Frank snarling about now?" May says, coming up, with a flush of annoyance on her face; "there is always something to upset me when we have these family meetings. It makes me wish that I lived miles away from any of you."

"How you can, in May's state of health, too, Frank," Mrs. Constable says, in a whisper, to poor Frank, who is smarting under the conviction that his sisters are feeling both pity and shame for him.

"Oh, please, mamma, don't make any appeals for me," May says touchily; "I can

take care of myself, fortunately, for he never tries to take care of me, or to save me any trouble or worry."

"Shall we finish this discussion in private, May?" Frank says, with a hard laugh; "it's very entertaining to us, of course, but possibly my sisters may find it embarrassing."

"We must admit that Frank is a very considerate brother," Mrs. Grange says, bringing herself prominently into the discussion in an exasperating manner.

"I wish you would not go on driving at a subject in this way," May whines out peevishly; "Frank doesn't say anything now—I'd much rather you did speak out, Frank, and say you're annoyed when you are annoyed—but I shall feel it in his manner by-and-by; and, oh dear! I wish over and over again that I hadn't married, to be made nervous and upset in this way," she winds up, bursting into a fit of hysterical sobbing.

"It's all as miserable as it can be," the

Forest girls are obliged to confess to their mother, when they are cross-questioned by her. "May has alienated the very slight love Frank had for her at one time altogether now; and she shakes her money-bags before his eyes every moment in the most humiliating way. Mother, it would have been a thousand times better if he had married Kate."

The days after this, for some time, are marked by no particular event. May fractiously contrives to make herself weak and ailing, and Frank, out of the torpor which ensues on heart-chill, refrains from trying to persuade her into taking better care of herself. He drinks the bitter cup of being dependent on his wife's bounty to the dregs, once or twice; for money melts away in a marvellous manner, directly it gets into the office of "The Unwarrantable," but his sanguine spirit always tells him that it will restore itself tenfold to his purse, purified and refined.

The relations between the husband and

wife grow cooler and cooler; and, mean-natured as May is, justice demands that the statement be made that the fault is not all on the side of the short-sighted woman: May is faulty, but Frank is not faultless.

It is after things have come to this stagnant pass for some little while between them, that Frank meets his cousin Kate, accidentally, one day, and persuades her, against her better judgment, to go with him into Kensington Gardens, and walk about for an hour, under the shadow of the grand old trees.

"The magazine is turning out a failure, and my marriage is a worse mistake still; Kate, my only hope is in your friendship, and a change has come over you."

"Fortunately—for you are married. I'll be truest friend—most affectionate cousin—sternest counsellor to you, Frank, if you'll let me," she answers.

"I should be a hound if I asked for more," he says, looking piteously at her; and

she gives him back a frank glance, free from all sentiment, and all danger.

"But I can't bear to think that another fellow has gained what I—threw away," he pleads.

"Now, I would make you love your wife, if I could," she says. "How different we are, after all! If I could turn your heart to May, I would do it, and be happy in doing it; but you would see me solitary-hearted still, you say. Frank, there is no friendship in that feeling; it's the offspring of selfishness; in indulging it you are being disloyal to May, and to me, and to your own nature."

She speaks excitedly, and even as she is speaking they come out near enough to the drive to see May pass in her Victoria, and for May to see them.

CHAPTER IX.

BEREFT.

May's pale blue eyes light upon the unlucky, but perfectly innocent, pair of offenders, and flash forth unmistakable scorn and distrust of them, and dire animosity against them. It is patent to her that Frank has broken his word, for he is not only speaking to his cousin, in spite of that promise he made to his wife on their wedding-day, but he is speaking very confidentially to her. "He only married me for my money," May tells herself, hitting the truth in her rage; "and has most likely carried on an intrigue with that bad, dangerous woman ever since. No one can blame me for leaving him, when it is known how abominably he has deceived me."

She goes straight to her mother's house, and takes counsel of that weakest of all counsellors as to her immediate line of action.

"He ought to be punished heavily," Mrs. Constable declares, tearfully. "He ought to be made to suffer; but leaving your husband is a terrible step to take, my dear, and you have not yourself only to consider, May; and I'm sure I don't know what to advise, or which way to turn."

"I have made up my mind to leave him, May says doggedly; "and I shall tell him so to-day, and all the world shall know the reason of it. If I am to be made miserable, she shall be dragged in the dust, and the Forests' pride shall be lowered pretty well, she adds vindictively.

"I am sure I wish it could be all undone and you unmarried, and that we had never heard of Frank Forest," Mrs. Constable says feebly; "but, as it is, I don't know what to advise. Shall we send your brother to him?"

"No," May says promptly. "I shall

enjoy his confusion when I tax him with it, and tell him plainly that he has broken his word; that he told a lie when he promised me on my wretched marriage-day that he would never speak to her again. He will think more of being charged with that, because it's dishonourable and ungentlemanly, than of being unfaithful to me. I may not be as clever as his Kate, but I'm clever enough to know how to sting Frank."

"It's a most miserably sad business," poor Mrs. Constable says mournfully, "for a mother to see her child's life wrecked through a man's wicked ingratitude and inconstancy; but if you could stay with him, May?"

"Mamma, I shouldn't have the spirit of a mouse if I did," May says, trying to speak with calm determination, but feeling inwardly, that if he pleads at all lovingly for forgiveness, that her resolution will be sapped, and that the mouse-like spirit, which she now condemns, will prevail.

Frank is awaiting her when she reaches home, prepared evidently to face the subject and discuss it at once; for he comes forward from his own study, as she enters the house, and follows her as she sweeps by him into the drawing-room.

"May," he begins, quietly, "you saw me with my cousin Kate, whom I met by accident——"

"Don't apologize and prevaricate," May says, beginning to speak very quickly, but coming to a sudden stop, by reason of finding that words which will fully characterize his conduct do not fall glibly from her lips.

"I have not the least intention of doing either," he says coldly, "I simply wish to offer you the explanation, in order to save you from worrying yourself."

"Do you think I care enough for you, after everything, to be annoyed by your behaviour? Indeed no. I was silly enough to think that you would keep your word, but it doesn't annoy me very much, even to find that you can break that without being

ashamed. I don't care how much you try and deceive the world, you can never deceive me again; never! clever as you think yourself, and foolish as you think me."

She pours out her accusation with a degree of volubility that astonishes him, and seems to fatigue herself, for she turns very pale, and puts her hand to her side, and seems to be in pain. All his manliness is roused by the sight of her suffering, and putting aside her words, as if they had never been uttered, he goes nearer to her, and says with real anxiety—

"May, let me beg you not to exert and upset yourself in this way; you can't stand it in your condition, and believe me, my dear child, you have no cause for it; my cousin——"

"Oh! don't speak to me of the false deceitful thing," she bursts out hysterically, "going on with a married man—breaking up a home—for I shall leave you for it, Frank: nothing——"

"Leave me! you must be mad to say it, though you can't mean it for a moment," he interrupts sternly. Then he is touched again by her womanly weakness, her physical inability to control herself, or to be coherent, or preserve anything like matronly dignity.

"My poor girl, be reasonable," he says pitifully; "I wouldn't pain or wrong you for the world, May; on my honour you have no cause for the annoyance you are betraying, I can only bitterly regret that accident should have led me to give it to you involuntarily. Forgive me," he says, with something like tenderness, for he does heartily pity the poor shaken reed, who so soon will be the mother of his child.

"Frank, I have been so unhappy," she sobs out, "and I feel so ill, and oh! I wish I had died before I married you, to be neglected and coldly treated." Then she moans with a pain that is new to her, and her heart sinks down to dismal depths, and life seems to be ebbing away from her, and she

feels as if she had no firm standing ground, and nothing on which to rely.

"Poor child!" he says, as she strives to rouse herself, and makes for the door totteringly. "I'll take you to your room, dear, and send for your mother."

To his own surprise, as he supports his now prostrated and almost helpless wife along, some of the love that he felt for her in the old days, when he knew her first, is revived in his heart. "I'll make you happier after this, May," he says humbly, as he puts her on the sofa in her room; and then he kisses her and whispers, "Forgive me, and take care of yourself, and bear it all bravely for my sake."

So the domestic storm blows over, and Frank, under the influence of the pity which men always feel for the bodily suffering of a young and pretty woman, is kind, and gentle, and affectionate to his wife, to a degree that causes her to forget Kate, and the fancied wrong that Kate had wrought. But the mental peace does not work the

cure of the body; and though they will not mention their fears to one another, her husband and all her family see that May gets weaker every day, and less able to bear the strain of the trial that is coming upon her.

In common with every man who carries a man's heart in his breast, Frank feels an anxiety as deep and true about May, as if he had loved her tenderly during the whole of their ill-starred married life. In common with every man who has passed through the same tribulation, he suffers remorse of the bitterest kind, when they come to him one night and tell him that he is the father of a daughter, and that his wife is dead.

On account of her losing her life in this the saddest way of all in which a woman can lose it, May is almost deified in the family, and Frank finds himself treated by his kith and kin as one from whom the glory has altogether departed. In very truth he does feel very heart-sore, very remorseful and regretful, in the early days of his widowerhood. After the manner of

humanity, he allows himself to be convinced by conventionality, and persuaded by the pious adjurations of friends that his loss is an irreparable one, and that May having vacated the throne so touchingly, no other woman will ever reign in his heart. While this phase of feeling lasts the Constables all love him as a son and brother, and strive to nurse and coddle his grief into a state of such strength as shall insure its lasting. Even society sides with them in this noble aim, and expresses itself to the effect that, undemonstrative as Mr. Forest had always appeared before it, it firmly believes that he will pay his lost May the glorious tribute of not replacing her, or at least of not replacing her with indecent haste. Another result of his abnormal condition is that "The Unwarrantable" slips out of the share of public favour it enjoyed under his auspices, and from being a healthy, struggling, lively venture, falls into the dark and dreary realms wherein other dead failures are decaying.

All May's money is securely tied down to the poor little daughter who has cost poor May her life. But Frank has a life interest in the income, and is free to waste it in any way he pleases, and he chooses "The Unwarrantable" way. Cutting down his expenditure on every other side, Frank (when he comes out of his half spurious slough of despond) flings it lavishly into the failing cause of the magazine. He advertises in every paper, he puts out neat little well-lettered boards, he offers fabulous sums to article and sketch writers who have names. But he keeps the unknown, the "new writer," on as the leading story teller, and the magazine that is not securely built up yet, goes down. It drags along a weary existence, damaging Frank's reputation as a dramatic author by the low circulation which his name is powerless to increase, advertise it ever so largely as he does. It ceases to be dear to him—unsuccessful things do generally cease to be dear to a man—and finally, a few months after May's death, he finds himself straitened

in circumstances, and a failure in periodical literature.

All this time, out of some vague and undefined feeling of deference to his late wife's wishes and prejudices, Frank has abstained from the society of the one person in the world who would have been powerful to comfort him. He has never seen Kate once since the day of that unlucky stroll in the park which May witnessed.

They have been weary weeks to Kate. Not on account of the separation from Frank, for the cause of this she thoroughly comprehends, and is true and womanly enough to thoroughly appreciate. "For we loved each other once," she says to herself, "and he might remember that love if he came near me in his first grief; remember it, and, against his own sense of what was right, strive to resuscitate it; though my love for him has changed to a sisterly affection that would enable me to strive for his good all my life, and cheerfully to resign the prospect of ever seeing him again."

But though she can be calm and philosophical, kind and considerate, about the man whom she does not love, she cannot be these things about the man whom she does. Captain Bellairs has seemed to vacillate considerably lately—has seemed to be undergoing the pangs of an inward struggle with which she must have something to do: for his eyes still tell a tale of love for her, which his tongue never by any chance endorses.

Cissy and Kate have parted company—their paths are completely sundered now, and they appear to have ebbed entirely away from one another's lives and interests. Cissy has the chameleon-like properties of change strongly developed. She is also blessed with a bad memory for benefits received from any one for whom she has a dislike. Her dislikes are conceived on very insufficient grounds, but she builds them up strongly by dint of talking them over, and mortaring them together with bitter words.

So on the whole, though Kate is very materially benefited by the breaking of the links which bound her to Cissy, she is suffering a good deal through having been unlucky enough to rouse Mrs. Angerstein's ill-will. For like many another weak woman, whose normal condition is passive amiability, she can on occasions dip her pen in virulence, and write words that have an uncanny look of truth and candour about them.

Harry Bellairs has been as good as his word to her. She has not yet told him that if he will come to her as a brother, she will receive him gladly, and simply as a brother. Therefore he has not put the temptation before her, by going to her as a friend who may possibly be transformed into something infinitely nearer and dearer. But though he has not been to see her, he has heard from her frequently, and she has indited many of those half-truths to him, which, on the authority of a great student of human nature, have been declared to be "ever the blackest of lies." In fact, she has made allusion and

implications, and has pitied Frank, and has blamed Kate, in such a pretty, graceful, friendly, essentially feminine way, that Harry Bellairs, sorely against both his love and his reason, is led to believe that his high-hearted, courageous Kate, who has a spirit that would impel her to leap any obstacle in life, has been "using him as a blind,"—deceiving him—doing him the most terrible wrong that one human being can do to another: that is, luring him on to show his real feelings, by flaunting feigned ones of her own before him.

The gallant, dauntless, free, frank Irishman is as shifting now in his conduct as the veriest sneak that ever walked the plank for cowardice. He is as a reed shaken by the wind, he is unstable as water, he is as pitifully uncertain of what he will be led into doing to-morrow as the weakest son of man has ever been! All this because of the want of that certain test which alchemists can apply to gold, but which man born of woman has not been permitted to find, or to use

efficaciously in the case of his fellow-creatures. We have to rely on idle words, and on still idler "chance," in order to prove—or to try—our fidelity one to another. Words are so weak—chance so capricious—opportunity so rare—that it is scarcely to be wondered at that scepticism reigns triumphant, and that we go on doubting each other, and fearing for ourselves to the end.

But oh! the pity of it! The pity that the feeble, temporary intangibilities should have the stronger sway, and that we—the puppets who are permanent through our own time at least—should be ruled, affected, actuated by a set of separate motives that spring from nothingness or malice! Who can fathom this mystery? that we are always so ready to doubt the maligned, never the maligner!

Kate Mervyn is no patient dove who can go on feeding on her own heart contentedly for ever. She is a woman with a set purpose in life, and haunting doubts that upset the balance of her mind disturb this purpose.

Further, she is a woman who never shrinks from asking a question because the answer to it may be disagreeable to her. Therefore she sits down, after long, sad, weary weeks of waiting for a renewal of the mental companionship that has been as a tonic to her, and writes as follows to Captain Bellairs :—

"I have done nothing to forfeit the friendship you proffered so freely. The cause is on your side, consequently only known to yourself. May I hear it? I ask, as I should wish to go on thinking of you as both a just and gentlemanly man. Physicians do not suddenly withdraw strong doses of quinine, without knowing the reason why. Your society has been mental quinine to me; why am I deprived of it?

"Yours very truly,

"KATE MERVYN."

CHAPTER X.

THE TIDE IS TURNED.

KATE bending wearily, after many long hours of incessant head and hand work, over the conclusion of a chapter that has not written itself easily, is a widely different Kate to the elastic, vigorous, beautiful, brilliant young woman who was employed in the congenial task of winning her cousin Frank, when she was first introduced to your notice. That Kate was all easy, nonchalant grace and freedom. This one is fettered by fatigue, and the consciousness that, for her, there can be no respite from that fatigue. For with the failure of "The Unwarrantable" has come the failure of the certain income she made by it. With fell rapidity she is learning the

harsh lesson that all the markets overflow, and that the ease with which she gained access to "The Unwarrantable" was one of those exceptions which prove the rule, that it is extremely difficult for a novice to get into print.

Straitened in circumstances, apparently deserted by the only two people in whose friendship she had for a long time been able to retain a belief—her cousin Frank, namely, and Captain Bellairs — working hard in the hopeless way in which one does literary work when need goads us and we are not sure of a place for it when it is finished; what wonder that Kate is rapidly losing her nerve, her elasticity, worse than all for a woman, her beauty. Long lines of care are traced beneath her eyes; those eyes themselves are tired, and shadowed darkly by the sadness of the present and the future which they are for ever contemplating. No note of reply has come to that short appeal she has made to Captain Bellairs. "I am forgotten,

absolutely forgotten by every one," she says, hopelessly throwing down her pen as she writes the last words of the chapter which has taxed her energies severely, and which she hates now that she has done it. She will be surprised herself when she sees it in print, and finds how easily the hardly-written chapter reads.

"It is only like Frank to vacillate, and blow hot and cold, and utterly forget the person who is not actively contributing to his pleasure or his pain," she says to herself—"but the other one! How can he forget that he taught me to rely on his friendship? how can he forget that he taught me to find it the brightest element in my life? He need have no dread of my trying to win more from him; but the companionship, the feeling that he had sympathy with me! Oh dear! what sin have I committed that he should punish me by withdrawing all this, and leaving my life more desolate than it was before?"

She cannot answer herself, and there is

no one near to answer her. It is useless to go on meditating on the inexplicable. The full hot beams of the August sun are pouring into her room. The row of flowers outside fails to afford any shade now. They have not been replenished lately, and they have grown weedy and straggling. Her room is pretty, and to a certain degree artistic in its arrangements. But it is barren in her eyes, for she has been obliged lately to rob it of many of her choicest possessions, and turn them into money, in order that she might live.

"I'll set to work again at ten o'clock," she thinks; "and I know a walk in the mean time would be good for me; but the mere goodness of it isn't enough to draw me out without another motive, while the sun is up, and the glare so great that all the ugliness and sordidness of the world stand out in bold relief. Semi-darkness softens down everything. I'll wait for the semi-darkness."

She is not one of the women who lounge

away much of their time. Lassitude and herself are comparative strangers. But this evening the brain-weariness which oppresses her communicates itself to her frame, and she goes over to a sofa in the darkest corner, and presently is fast asleep.

In a happy dream that is partly supplied by memory and partly by fancy, she remains steeped in unconsciousness for hours. When she awakes herself the moon is shining softly, and an uneasy feeling pervades Kate that she is not alone in the room, that there is some one near her.

"Kate," a familiar voice says, before her heart has time to give more than one throb of fear; "Kate, dear! I thought you would never wake," and she finds herself taken by both hands and raised from her recumbent position by her cousin Frank.

With a few words of hearty, cheery welcome, she springs to her feet and lights her lamp, and comes back to his side, to tell him how glad she is to see him again. It is the first time they have met since May's death.

"Why have you never written to me?" he asks, taking both her hands, and gazing searchingly into her face.

"I wrote once, when your wife died. I wrote to offer you all my sisterly love and sympathy then, Frank; and as you never answered me I thought that you didn't want either."

"You wrote then?"

"Yes; have you forgotten? Well, poor boy, I don't wonder at your forgetting; you have had enough lately to drug your memories."

"I never had your letter," he says impatiently. "Forgotten it! I was always longing to receive it; if I had done so, I shouldn't have been likely to let it remain unanswered, or to forget it; why, Kate, I have felt your holding aloof from me as the hardest blow of all."

"Yet you have held aloof from me?"

"That's a very different matter. I have had to consider several things; I have been working in chains, to tell the truth,

but I am determined to break them now; I have come to tell you——"

"Tell me about you all," Kate interrupts hastily. "How is Aunt Marian, and the girls? are they married, or engaged? and tell me about your little child, Frank."

"My mother and the girls are well; as for the child, I am not sure that I have anything to do with it, though I'm its father. It seems to be entirely Constable property, and if my own mother and sisters so much as look at it there is a fuss immediately in the Constable camp, and they declare that something has gone wrong with it."

He looks gloomy and self-absorbed, discontented and unhappy, and Kate's heart yearns towards him.

"Grandmothers often do make everybody about them excessively uncomfortable by their love for their grandchildren," she says excusingly; "it will be different by-and-by, when the child is older and

comes to you; is it with Mrs. Constable altogether?"

"It's worse than that," Frank says, with a piteous grimace; "when my poor girl died I let them settle things exactly as they pleased, and when I began to think about how things were going, I found that Mrs. Constable had let her own house on rather a long lease, and had come to live in mine; since then the Granges have quartered themselves on me, for a visit that bids fair to last for the term of their natural lives! Heaven and earth! I never realized how odious my fellow-creatures were, until I fell under the dispensation of the Constables."

Kate bursts out laughing.

"It is a piteous picture," she says; "but why, if you don't like your guests, don't you define the term of their visit? Mrs. Constable is placid and powerless enough."

"Backed up by the baby she's appallingly strong," Frank replies. "You

don't know how that innocent child is used for the overthrow and complete subjugation of its wretched father. If I smoke in my own study, the only room in the house where I am not liable to a Constable invasion at any moment, the 'baby's cough' is dwelt upon with such sad gusto for days afterwards that I feel an infanticide; if I am out late at night, they declare that on my return home the nurses heard me and were alarmed, and in turn woke the baby and alarmed it, and that its state for days will, in consequence, be critical."

"And you stand this?"

He shrugs his shoulders.

"But why, Frank, why? I, as a woman, would shatter such chains in an hour; and you, with your brains, the prestige of the name you have made—oh! it's ignominy of the worst kind," the girl cries out angrily.

He rises impatiently and paces about the room.

"Look here," he presently bursts out, "it's

all very well to talk in that way, Kate; but the ground is cut from under my feet. I have wasted nearly everything I could lay my hands on in that infernal magazine, and the prestige seems to have gone from my name in consequence of it; while I was neglecting dramatic writing for the sake of doing a big thing with the magazine, other fellows came and hit the managerial and public tastes; and now, when I want to go back to it, they say, 'No, thank you; we've hit out something fresh, your vein is played out.' Besides, it isn't the need of making money that bothers me. I shall be all right again in a short time; it's the not having my house to myself that I can't stand."

"As I said before, get rid of them; you pay the rent of the house, don't you?"

"Yes; and they are careful to make me comprehend that they know from whom the money originally came with which the rent is paid," he rejoins. "My dear Kate, there is only one thing that will oust them

from my house, and that is my taking a wife into it."

Now, Kate knows that the words which she is most strangely anxious to avert will make themselves heard presently. How can she tell him a truth that it will be very bitter for him to hear, namely, that her heart has withdrawn itself from him as utterly as if it had never been given? "And poor Frank is so sure of me, too," she adds mentally.

"That would be a very strong measure, wouldn't it?" she answers aloud, as calmly as she can. "At any rate, you can't think of taking it yet for many months to come. Don't talk of marriage as your only means of escape from such contemptible bondage either, dear Frank; it's degrading to the possible woman whom you may marry. It's just the time I had fixed upon to recommence my work," she adds abruptly. "Come and see me soon; to-morrow, if you like; but leave me now, for my work must be done."

"My poor girl!" he says, and he says it very tenderly, and draws himself nearer; while she busies herself with the arrangement of her writing materials.

"Don't pity me," she says, with a slight quiver in her voice. "In a little time I mean to ask you to congratulate me as a successful author. By the way, did I help to kill 'The Unwarrantable?' It has been on my conscience, very often, that I sapped its constitution, and undermined its strength?"

"You shall hear me; you shall not put me off with commonplaces any longer," he says petulantly; and he puts his arm round her and draws her close to his side. "Have you forgotten——"

"I have not forgotten anything," she interrupts rapidly. "I have not forgotten that I loved you weakly and wickedly; and that I showed that love to a wicked and weak degree, considering that you were engaged, honour-bound, to another woman."

"I am free now," he replies.

"Ah! but, Frank," and here all the contradictory spirit of the true woman shows itself, "I told you I had not forgotten anything. Among other things, I have not forgotten how you played fast and loose with me, when every time you drew the strings to regulate my conduct, you must have known that you were breaking the very fibres of my heart."

She speaks with almost convulsive energy, and he looks at her with the blank astonishment a man is apt to feel, when a woman does not appear ready to throw herself at his feet the instant he whistles for her.

"I was tongue-tied, hand-bound," he is beginning, but she stops him.

"Don't excuse yourself; you acted for the best, according to your lights, and we have both suffered; but the suffering is past now, and we can take each other by the hand, and heartily hope that each other's future will be happier than the past, and be quite satisfied that these futures will not be spent together."

"In fact, you have quite done with me?" he says, in a hurt tone.

"Yes, Frank, as I would have done with a horse that refused a big leap with me, a hound that took to running cunning, or any man who withdrew his friendship from me, when he had taught me to find that friendship very dear, and the brightest thing in my life."

"You use hard words, Kate," he says, in an offended tone. Somehow or other, that sentence respecting the "hound which has taken to running cunning" galls him considerably. For he is ignorant of the fact of its being a coursing term, and fancies that it is specially applied to himself.

"And you used harder deeds—deeds that hurt me horribly," she retorts quickly; "you cured me of my love by cruelty."

"Cruelty!"

"Ay, cruelty; there are more cruel things than striking a blow with your hand, I think; you gave me a glimpse in my shaded life of what life might be to me

illumined by the sunshine of your sympathy and love; and you withdrew them from me, just as they had become essential to me; wasn't that cruel?"

"It was, Kate."

"It was nothing of the sort, it was weakness of will; it was the veriest bowing the head before the image of the dread Mrs. Grundy. Oh, Frank! don't rouse my feelings of indignation on behalf of that girl whom you toyed with thoughtlessly. I think of her as entirely another being from myself, I assure you; let us put everything but cousinly feeling and friendship away from us, and you'll find me all that either of the fondest can ever be to you; but don't talk of other love—that is over."

All this time his arm has been round her, and her hands have been clasped on his shoulder. She releases herself from him now, after just leaning her face towards, and giving him a kiss, so quiet and passionless, that it tells him more plainly than her words, even, that her love for him is indeed

dead. "Is there another fellow in the way?" he asks himself angrily, but he dare not ask the question of her yet.

"I shall come again to-morrow; I won't let the little interest you still have in me drop."

"Do come—not that I need your presence to keep my interest in you alive," she says frankly; and just then the postman's rap is heard, and a letter is brought in and handed to her.

His quick glance falls on handwriting and crest at once; he recognizes both, and his jealous fancy tells him that in that letter is to be found the cause of Kate's refusal to listen to the renewal of his own love-vows.

"I had better leave you, perhaps," he says pointedly; "your letter will take you about an hour to read, judging from the length of it."

"Perhaps you had," she says, in the vague way people do speak when they are striving to master the contents of a letter which they have been eagerly anticipating.

CHAPTER XI.

MORE JUST THAN GENEROUS.

Frank is gone from the room, in a huff, be it remembered.

Kate is alone with the moonlight, which she has forgotten to shut out, and the lamplight by which she is trying to read this letter, which trembles in her hand. She has cast her all upon the hazard of a die, and she knows that she has done this as she stands there, with the letter quivering like an aspen leaf in her grasp. The commencement is not auspicious; when a man has been in the habit of calling a girl by her Christian name, it looks ill for the continuance of their intimacy if he suddenly and seriously addresses her as—

"My dear Miss Mervyn,

"Is my coming to call on you likely to give happiness to either of us? Is not the wish that I should do so rather a desire on your part to exercise your power and authority over me, to show to me and to prove to yourself that you have this power and authority? For many months we held habitual and friendly intercourse, and during that time if I ever attempted to pass the bounds of conventional friendship with you, you consistently repulsed me. I attributed this to your keen recollection of an offence against you which was purely accidental on my part, and for which I was anxious to atone in a way that I fervently hoped, and truly believed, would have conduced to the happiness of us both. You judged differently, and took the word of a stranger in preference to mine! Kate, that was your first, your only error. I have striven as earnestly and honestly as a man can strive to remove the false impression, and resuscitate the possibility of our being happy

together. But, for a time, your will intervened, and now, to be honest and truthful with you still, a doubt of your perfect integrity and fidelity is intervening. Is it true—tell me for Heaven's sake—that you loved your Cousin Frank so disloyally and unwisely that you would have parted him from the girl to whom he was engaged?—that you spared no lure, no temptation that might have led him to dishonour himself? these are hard words with which to question the woman I love, but they will get themselves spoken. That you should have loved him is easily enough understood. That you should have tried to make him break his word, and forget his honour, is, in my eyes, an unpardonable thing. Your simple denial of the charge will be enough for me. I would, at any time, take your word against the world's. That denial will bring me back to you, and make me try to win your heart more earnestly than ever. Think with what impatience I wait for it.—Yours,

"HARRY BELLAIRS."

She reads the letter through twice, and feels as if her brain were bursting, and her heart broken. But there is no sign of agitation in the wording or writing of the note which she indites and despatches without a minute's delay—

"It is perfectly true. Good-bye."

The letter is gone, and with it her hopes of ever attaching solely and wholly to herself that faithful friendship, that good loyal love, that brave, generous, honest fellow who will cut his own heart out rather than condone duplicity. "It is perfectly true, it is perfectly true; but if I could only bring myself to explain to him how it all came about, he would forgive me, I am sure," she says to herself, as she sits gazing into vacancy, forgetful even of her all-important work, in the first hour of her anguish.

To be accused of disloyalty, of want of honour towards another woman, of having attempted to sap and undermine the fidelity of a man—this is indeed a novel form of misery for poor, proud Kate. The fascina-

tion and finesse, the light lure, and graceful, gay fooling with which she had sought to win Frank in those days of her loving him before he was married, had all come so easily to her, and had all been evoked by such a strong set of circumstances! It had never occurred to her to blame herself, or to look shamefacedly on either her motives or her actions. Indeed, she had rather been disposed to hold herself as guiltless, and Frank as guilty, in being so weak and vacillating, so easily swayed backwards and forwards between love and duty. But now, when Harry Bellairs calls her conduct by its true name, she sees it in its right light, and owns herself justly repulsed and defeated.

Justly: but how cruelly! As cruelly as most women are defeated in the great romantic game of chess which they call love.

Wearily, presently she turns to her work, and traces line after line in her efforts to delineate the joys and sorrows of those fictitious friends of hers, by means of whom she

hopes to live now. Unconsciously she makes those joys akin to some which she has known, those sorrows most strangely like those she is bearing at present. Love, disappointment, and penury, these are the themes on which she finds she can dilate most freely and most forcibly.

Her pen travels very freely to-night. "What is it that carries her along?" she questions of herself as the hours pass by, and she finds herself going on writing, in a way that is singularly effortless. It is in reality the strong necessity which her nature feels for respite from the thought of this womanly love of hers, which, woman-like, she is attempting to keep at bay by means of work.

The clocks in the neighbourhood strike one, and, as they do so, she rises up with a gasp of physical fatigue, and the recollection that she has not tasted food for twelve hours. For Kate pursues the abominably bad plan of dining in the middle of the day, and working after her dinner. Conse-

quently her digestion is impaired, her work upset, and her day spoilt by being badly divided.

It is hard work for a woman who has been taxing her imagination for hours, to rise up from her desk, and practically assist herself to the necessaries of life. It is odious to feel that unless you put away all your finer fancies for a time, thereby running the risk of losing them altogether, and go to work in a prosaic way to find fuel to feed the poetic fire, that you will presently be so physically weak as to be disabled altogether, and utterly unfit to continue in the course in which you are bound to run unless you would perish. If some loving hand could minister to Kate now, for instance, she would finish this chapter ever so much better than she will now, for she will return to it with a broken interest and a perplexed feeling of doubt as to its being worth while to struggle on, merely for the means of sustaining the struggle.

This doubt, this feeling, is paramount in

her mind as she comes back to her writing-table, and it sadly interferes with composition. She has not indulged herself with another reading of that honest, harsh letter of his, all this time; but now, as she sits here doing nothing, and not feeling capable of doing anything, she feels that there will be a certain amount of relaxation in the very pain which she will compel herself to endure in the re-perusal of it. So she takes it up, and walks over to the window, meaning to read it by the moonlight.

She stands there—a very pretty figure, in a clinging neutral-hued dress. Her head is bent, her face is sad, her eyes are riveted on the pages of the letter paper. She is unconscious of observation, absorbed in the memories of the past, and the intense consciousness that those memories present happier possibilities to her than the realities of to-day or the time to come can conjure up. Her little nervous hands hold the paper tightly, lovingly: "If I were younger I'd burn it with my lips," she says, as she

flutters the letter towards her bent face, but refrains from committing that crowning act of folly.

Surely we all know how we read over and over again words that are already imprinted on our minds? They are indited by a hand we love—a hand that has hurt us in all probability, or that at any rate has been very willing to apply the correcting rod. But as soon as it condescends to pen a letter to us, how we gloat over the chastening treasure, and read, and re-read, and dwell upon each word and comma, and endeavour with all our heart, and will, and force, to make so much of so little!

She is standing thus, when a man passes and sees her, and she is unaware that she is seen. The road is very quiet. With the exception of a cat or two upon the tiles opposite, and a policeman patrolling vaguely and aimlessly at the end of the terrace, there is no one near. Juliet-like she bends out of her window, but un-Juliet-like she abstains from rashly

apostrophising the moon or any person by name. But she says—

"If he were here I know I could make him understand the why and wherefore of it all," she says aloud (very foolishly) to herself, and as she says it, the man who has been patrolling pulls himself up abreast of her window, and calls out, clearly—

"God bless you, Kate, I am here, and you shall make me understand the why and wherefore of it to-morrow morning."

He is standing there, handsome, brave, and strong, underneath her window, and the girl disregards propriety in her joy, and bends down to speak to him, to tell him that she is glad he is there.

"Have you had my answer?" she asks. "No, the post is no Mercury, to put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes. Harry, you are here because you don't know what I have written, you don't know yet that I have told you that it is all true."

"I am here because—I am a fool," he

says, with a certain amount of truthfulness, for he feels that there is something incongruous in this conversation at an open window in a by-road in Bayswater. Then he sees her lamp flare, and observes that she retreats hurriedly from the window, and goes away smoking his midnight cigar, with the wretched consciousness upon him that, by his ill-advised conduct, he has brought Kate into an awkward position with her landlady.

His conscience does not prick him undeservedly. The mistress of the house is a dragon as regards the respectability and virtue of others, and thinks it necessary to keep vigilant watch and ward over the proceedings of her lodgers. The conversation at the window has not been lost upon her, and she comes into the room now, after one passionate knock which she does not wait to have responded to in any way, and takes Kate unawares.

"Do you know that this is a respectable house, Miss?" she begins, shivering out her

words. "What the drawing-rooms must think of such goings on, I don't know. If I lose them through this, I shall let them know—and let everybody else know —what I think of you."

"But," Kate begins protesting, as the woman brings her tirade to a conclusion, "I have done nothing but speak to a person I know through an open window—"

"Ah! how does that person come to be here at your open window?" the British matron asks, or rather shrieks. "Tell me, indeed! I know what open windows mean, and I know what good-looking young women mean when they sit up writing late at night. I like to call things by their right names, I do; and pleasant-spoken young lady as you are, if the drawing-rooms take it up, I shall say 'go you must.'"

The woman is standing holding the door in one hand, and a chamber-candlestick in the other. She is robed in a

horrible red dressing-gown, which pales before a visage that has become inflamed by the exertion she has used to be at once impressive and aggressive. Kate looks at her, at this woman who dares to bring an accusation against her, and all the purity and refinement which have surrounded Kate from her cradle urge her to rise in revolt against her tormentor.

"Leave my room now, and I will leave your house in the morning," she says quietly. Then for fear she should break down and cry before this woman, Kate turns to the window, hoping to gather strength from the fresh, free air, and courage from the sight of the man who loves her still, coldly as he has called his judgment to his aid about her.

But he has seen another shadow in her room, and by reason of the very love he bears her, he has taken himself out of the way, fearing that his presence near may be detrimental to her reputation in that other person's eyes. After the manner of

men in love in general, and of Irishmen in particular, he is cautious in the wrong place about the woman he loves.

The virago in the red dressing-gown is quick to hear, and prompt to see, whatever may be disagreeable to the person to whom she is temporarily opposing herself. She catches a sound of the short, deep sigh which Kate cannot help heaving as she watches Harry Bellairs turn the corner of the street and stride out of reach of her, however much she may need. The look of disappointment, too, is legibly stamped upon her face as she turns it roomwards again.

"Gone away the moment he thought he might get hisself into trouble, like all your fine gentlemen do when you ladies hold yourselves too cheap," the woman sniggers; and as she flounces out of the room, and lets the door fall behind her in a way that is very derogatory to the dignity of the occupant of the room, Kate feels that there is a certain sort of broad, coarse justice in the woman's last remark.

"I have built upon shifting sands," the girl thinks as she sits down, and resolutely tries to look into and prepare for the future. "I have trusted and vainly believed in man after man, woman after woman, and they have all proved themselves to be houses built upon the sand. I have worked for the present need—I have been mindful only of the present hour—I have set myself so low a mark to aim at that I have had no pride in touching even it—I have suffered myself to be trammelled by my sex; and I am punished."

She gives herself freely to regret and sorrow, for the necessity of that regret having arisen for a while. Then she rises up, prepared to carve out such a future for herself as shall make it so dear to her that she can never bemoan the past. She does not in this first hour of enthusiasm attempt to lay down any definite "noble aim" which she will struggle to reach. But she vows—and she is not a woman

to break a vow, though it be made to herself only—that whatever comes to her hand to do, she will do it with such fire and force and constancy, as will make her love her work, and find it all-sufficient.

All-sufficient, even though that sweetest leavener of life, Love, be denied to her for ever.

"The first thing I do to-morrow shall be to swallow my pride, and go and make a clean breast of it to Aunt Marian," Kate thinks, as she lays the head that will be homeless to-morrow on the pillow this night. "If she doubts and rebuffs me! well, I'll win through by possessing my soul in patience."

CHAPTER XII.

A RECOGNITION.

Does any reasonable human being really believe that "absence makes the heart grow fonder"? or that "separation cements the bonds of real love and friendship"? Surely not. Absence is a slow poison which must, sooner or later, emaciate, even if it does not effectually kill, the most robustly constituted affection. The only sort of love that is not weakened by absence is the pure love of parents for their children — of children for their parents—and the delightful spirit of comradeship which we call fraternal love. These bonds, once firmly made, are never broken. But in every other relation which exists between men and women, whether

it be passionate love or sentimental friendship, separation is dangerous, not to say fatal. Fallen human nature needs the quick return of the sympathy that can only be fully expressed by lip, eye, and hand; pen, ink, and paper are utterly powerless to express it properly. Or even if it be sufficiently powerfully expressed to bring back the allegiance of the one to whom it is addressed, if it arrives in time, a hitch in the post-official arrangements may delay it, until the subject about which sympathy was craved for so wildly only the other day, is dead and almost forgotten.

For months Kate Mervyn has been living her life apart from every member of her family. For months those finely-drawn, but almost imperceptible, barriers, the little incidental interests of every-day life, have been gone through on each side without the other side having any cognizance of them. Fresh figures have been painted in on the respective

canvases of their lives. Hopes have died, disappointments have been born to each and all of them; but the deaths and the births have not been notified by either to the other, though they have been of vital importance to those whom they have respectively affected.

But this belief in the inevitable change which must come over the separated, though it is a widely-spread one, is one about which few people trouble themselves to think, until they experience it in a mortifying way, or have to write about it. Kate Mervyn goes to her aunt's house the day after her dismissal on account of the feeling of the "drawing-rooms," in the firm faith that the Forests will be ready to resuscitate the past, between which and the present such a blank space intervenes. She really believes, in the profundity of her inexperience, that if they have heard nothing that is detrimental to her character, and therefore distressing to their pride, they will be ready to help her to

pick up all the broken threads, and join them neatly together again.

Unwisely enough, she puts herself at the great disadvantage of fatiguing herself, and getting dusty, and slightly disordered in attire, before she presents herself before her relatives. Executive women, who are compelled to spin from their own brain the materials for making the web which is their habitation, and, at the same time, are obliged to personally superintend and see to the general arrangement of the web, are not, it must be confessed, invariably such faultlessly appointed housewives as are the women who have nothing on earth to do but to supervise the wardrobes of their husbands and children, and the ordering of their house.

She has been obliged to trudge about for many weary hours in search of lodgings that are comfortable, respectable, and, at the same time, cheap. The three qualifications are rarely co-existent. Even when she lights upon the combination, it is in such

out-of-the-way districts that she is naturally keenly averse to settling herself in any one of them. At length she comes upon a quiet little row of houses in Maida Vale, with little neatly-kept gardens in front of them, and, in front of the gardens, the Regent's Canal.

There is something strange and almost un-London-like about the place. Looked at in a matter-of-fact way, there is nothing particularly picturesque in a coal barge ; but it really is a very fine feature in the view, when you see it trailing its slow length along, silently, on a moonlight night. The sluggish, rippleless water is effective, too, in its imperturbable calm and density. A bounding, passionate river, that leaps over boulders, and breaks perpetually into cascades and waterfalls, has not half the power which this motionless canal possesses, of compelling us to stand still and consider.

By the time she has settled the terms for, and inducted her belongings into, the new lodgings, it is four o'clock in the afternoon,

and Kate is, as has been said, at the great disadvantage of being dusty, disordered, and fatigued. The tight, plain, well-fitting black alpaca dress has taken several creases unto itself, by reason of having had its folds wedged in between some of the boxes which have been crammed into the cab. The equally well-fitting gloves have lost their pristine purity in the transit. Above all, the face of the wearer of these things is shaded over by the physical fatigue that almost always supplements intense mental anxiety in the case of highly organized people, and there is a certain weary lassitude in her demeanour, which ought to warn her to stay at home to rest and recover.

She adventures into her aunt's house at an inauspicious moment. Afternoon tea is going on, so are two gentlemen, who are respectively forging chains wherewith to bind themselves to Gertrude and Marian. Little, delicate Dresden cups and saucers sit upon a silver tray—cups and saucers about

which forget-me-nots, in high relief, twine. Silver doves, the birds of love, support a cake basket upon their extended wings; cupids sprawl over every perfectly-painted plate, and aim darts at Venuses and other scantily-attired people in the most sportive way. A bright, clear fire is blazing away merrily behind a painted glass screen, which seductively softens the light and makes it becoming. Dresses of the day, or, rather of the hour, swathe the figures of the Misses Forest—dresses that cleverly unite the requirements of late autumn and early winter, that are not too rich in hue, and yet are, at the same time, warm in texture. These fit them like riding habits, as to the bodies, and are buckled and poignarded about them, as to the tunics, in the most approved way. Their hair is tied back tightly, a little above the napes of their necks, in the newest and most artistic fashion of 1874, and allowed to fall down in a luxuriant pig-tail on to their backs. All is grace, warmth, beauty, and glow

about the room and about its occupants. Kate, in her dingy attire, feels that she falls like a shadow upon them all, dimming their radiance. The two gentlemen, softened by the situation, have breathed words that fall musically upon the ears of Gertrude and Marian. Poor Kate's greeting, half timorous, half touching as it is, sounds like a discord. They do not mean to be unkind. They do not design to turn the cold shoulder upon her, and to show her that she is not wanted. But these things occur against their knowledge. They do not hate her in fact; but they had all been loving each other and themselves so comfortably and well before she appeared, that they cannot amalgamate with her. She comes in as utterly extraneous matter, foreign to the situation; and, as she falls upon them like a cloud, they fall upon her like a chill.

Mrs. Forest holds out a slender, cool hand, and says, "Kate, my dear, why invent surprises of this kind when life is so full of unavoidable ones? You should have

written to say you were coming, and we would have been better prepared to receive you." She says this civilly enough, but she does not rise from her chair, and she does not embrace Kate; and poor Kate stands in their presence feeling very rickety on her feet, and very much as if she preferred her little dimity-hung solitude in Maida Vale to the silken splendour wherewith she is at present surrounded, and in the midst of which she feels so extremely uncomfortable.

The two girls have the grace to rise, and to sham a certain amount of pleasure.

"Kate, have a cup of tea at once; you look fagged out," Gertrude says, putting one hand out to Kate and the other on the bell as she speaks. Marian even goes a step further. She lays a smooth, cool cheek against Kate's, and says—

"I'm so glad to see you. We should have thought you were lost, dear, if we had had time to think about anything lately."

"Poor Frank's loss distracted our atten-

tion from everything else," Mrs. Forest interrupts, with an air of pious pride that is infinitely edifying.

"Poor Frank's 'losses,' you should say, mamma," Marian laughs; "that poor dear unlucky 'Unwarrantable.' I am sure I for one watched its death-throes with the most acute anxiety." Then she remembers that Kate must have watched its death-throes with an even keener anxiety, and she pulls herself up with that conscious look on her face, which is one of the most embarrassing forms of unintentional apology which one human being can offer to another.

There is a little re-assuring fuss made about the tea, under cover of which she steadies her head and her nerves, and sits down and tries to gauge the exact depth of feeling there is in the water which she has disturbed. Presently, as she gains self-command enough to turn her eyes away from her aunt, who is languidly questioning her as to what she is doing now, and asking her if she "won't come and spend a nice

quiet day" with them, her attention is arrested by the earnest gaze of one of the men who is paving his way into bondage by means of afternoon tea. There is a familiar expression in the face that perplexes her, but before she can identify it her aunt speaks to her again, and when she looks back at the place where he sat, he has gone to the other end of the room, where the piano stands, with Gertrude.

"It is a great comfort to me," Mrs. Forest goes on, in an irritatingly mechanical way, "that you should have devised such a pleasant and remunerative way of making an income, Kate. I don't always know what you write, but when I do I always read it with the greatest interest. I am sure if I had been blessed with the health to stand it, there is nothing that I should have liked better than writing myself; nothing."

Kate looks at her aunt in wonderment. The superb, the almost sublime, conceit is a genuine thing; it is not shammed. Mrs. Forest, be it remembered, is a woman who

can wind about a subject gracefully enough with her tongue; with her pen she is capable of writing an invitation to dinner or an at-home.

"Then you don't think that I have disgraced you?" Kate questions, half satirically. The little double-meaning in her words is known only to herself.

Mrs. Forest shakes her head. Her girls are well disposed of out of earshot with their respective admirers. Gertrude is struggling with a song; Marian is reading a new poem in a low voice. All is safe. She holds out a kind hand to the girl in the begrimed alpaca, and says—

"My dear child, is there any disgrace in poverty, in honest work, in the womanly wish to be independent of the relations who are far from being well off themselves? I esteem you for your exertions, Kate, and hope that you will continue to make them."

Kate is touched almost to laughter, and almost to tears, by the laudatory remark. She, however, wisely refrains from either;

for extremes, she remembers, are dangerous. A glow of satisfaction diffuses itself through all her being as she realizes from her aunt's manner that her aunt knows nothing of that childish, bitterly repented-of thoughtlessness which led her to suffer the will of the moment to lead her away so many years ago in Torquay.

"It is dead and buried; it will never be resuscitated," she tells herself, with a gulp of honest joy. "Do I deserve this blessing that I may be good all my life, without the fear being ever present before me of having the folly of my very early girlhood cast in my teeth at any moment? Hard work, poverty, obscurity, all these are nothing, now that the dread of being weighed down by the consequences of that brief madness are removed from me."

She tells herself this in happy faith. She ceases to be oppressed by the consciousness of the contrast there is between her costume and the costumes of her cousins. Dingy, dusty she may be, but no one present has

heard such a false report of her as may induce them to think her degraded or depraved. No person who has not been falsely accused, can fully comprehend the awful bitterness of the shame one feels in the fact of the false accusation having been made. Conscious innocence is a very fair thing theoretically. But, practically, conscious innocence is no comfort whatever, to the one in whose bosom it reigns, when that one is smarting under slights, or ground down to the earth by scorn.

"Yes," Mrs. Forest says, resuming the subject with a jerk, "come and spend a nice long, quiet day with us, Kate. What day will suit you, now? It is always better to be definite, and I will arrange it."

"Really, Aunt Marian," Kate says, "I don't want any special arrangements made for me; let me come in when I have time. If you are out, I can but go away again."

"The girls are so much engaged just now," Mrs. Forest says, in a lowered tone; "Mr. Clement Graham takes up a great

deal of Gertrude's time, and there can be no doubt whatever of his object in doing it."

"Mr. Clement Graham!" Kate repeats wonderingly.

"Yes," Mrs. Forest says, giving a warning glance towards the piano, where Gertrude's prey is entreating some one to "Love him once again, meet him once again," and avowing that he feels warm fingers clasped in his, and sees those quivering lips. "That is Mr. Clement Graham," Mrs. Forest goes on in a whisper; "he has been here a great deal lately, and in fact, my dear Kate, as a mother, I cannot blind myself to the truth; he admires Gertrude very much, and it will be a most excellent match for her."

As in a vision, Kate recalls the scene and the actors in it, when she last heard Clement Graham discussed in this house. She remembers Gertrude's indignation against her sister Marian, because Marian had bowed to the unfortunate man in the Park, and invited him to the house, in spite of his having been dismissed the service.

"He has succeeded in justifying himself in your eyes?" she asks: "he has proved himself innocent of everything save——"

"He has come into a large fortune, dear boy," Mrs. Forest says warmly; "don't exclaim, he'll hear you."

"Hear me! is he here?" Kate mutters; and the man at the piano facing round at the moment, she recognizes and is recognized by Clement Graham.

When last they met, she, a beautiful brilliant young girl, was dressed in a perfectly-fitting riding-habit, and her brow was shaded by a hat. Now a black alpaca, gone from long wear to a rusty brown hue, drapes her unbecomingly, and conceals the symmetry of her faultless figure. Instead of the hat, care now shades her brow. But though these are great changes indeed, Clement recognizes her.

He comes half a yard forward, he hesitates, stops and looks uneasily at her, and she all the time is gazing at him with wide open eyes, and with lips that are parted as

if in fear. He, mild and innocent, and rather mean and small-minded young man as he is, looms before her as a dread avenger! He will tell the story of her flight to her relations, and they will never believe her version of it—never trust in her as a good true girl, whose sole fault was a fault of circumstances.

The moments are weighted by such painful feelings that they lag and seem like hours. In reality, the time is very short that is occupied in this by-play. Before Mrs. Forest and Gertrude are able to be perplexed, Mr. Clement Graham comes forward and says—

"I think we ought to know each other without an introduction."

CHAPTER XIII.

"I DON'T LIKE HIM."

Mrs. Forest is astonished, the cousins are aghast, the cause of all this uncomfortable exaltation of feeling is at her wits' end. Instantly she understands that if she admits Mr. Clement Graham's mode of introducing himself to her, she must admit all that must follow his explanation of their unlucky rencontre, her share in it—all, everything.

For a few moments the strong temptation to protect herself, the strong instinct of self-preservation at any cost, assails her and saps her courage: she is tempted to deny all knowledge, all recollection of him. As a gentleman, he can but accept her denial, and suffer her to go her way in peace. She almost gives way, she almost flings herself into the

coward's part, she almost does evil that good may come. But happily the bright, proud spirit within her, though it has been beaten down and crushed and tamed by undeserved suffering, is alive still, and ready to answer to any true call that may be made upon it. She speaks, and, as she hears her own words, she feels that she would have been a false woman indeed if she had spoken any others.

"Indeed we do not need an introduction to each other, Mr. Graham. Every face and incident connected with the most unlucky day of my life is stamped upon my memory, in characters that will last as long as that memory itself."

He is a weak, talkative, gossiping, scandal-loving man, but he is not ill-natured; and now, as he looks at Kate, and marks that expression of being at bay which has come into her eyes, he feels very sorry both for her and himself. Sorry for her in that his speech has annoyed her so much; sorry for himself that he should have been the utterer of that speech. He finds that he has no

words at command wherewith to continue the conversation; he is at the same time keenly curious as to "what happened to Bellairs and the girl" after his intervention, and afraid to ask a single question for fear of getting himself into a scrape. The Misses Forest mark, and to a certain extent enjoy, his confusion, for they have a share of their brother's sense of humour. But Clement Graham has come into a large fortune lately, and Gertrude has no intention of enjoying too openly anything that tends to put him at a disadvantage.

"One comes across people so queerly every now and then," he says presently, with a weak, thin laugh that takes its rise in the reverse of anything like mirthful feeling. "Just met each other at a railway station once, didn't we? and now here we meet again, don't you know?"

"It is a very surprising thing to meet a person again whom you have once seen at a railway station," Marian laughs. "Kate, you tell us what marked the memorable

occasion so strongly on the minds of both of you. Perhaps you had lost your purse, and he had to lend you the money to pay for your fare; perhaps he saw you drinking lemonade in the refreshment room? Tell us the worst." And Marian comes up and puts her hands on Kate's shoulders, and bends her head down, and shows herself spiritedly to be a partisan of Kate's on the spot.

"Perhaps it was ever so much worse than anything your fancy has painted," Kate whispers in reply, and she longs to tell out the whole story, and bear the brunt of the hardest suspicion that may be levelled at her, without delay.

"I detest mystification," Gertrude cuts in contemptuously. "Kate seems to be trying to weave a romance about something; if it amuses her and Mr. Graham that she should do it, let her." Gertrude is unmistakably angry, and jealous. She has made herself very agreeable to the weak, wealthy young man by her side lately, and he cannot endure to witness the slightest sign of wrath from her.

"I am sure Miss Mervyn will do me the justice to say that I had no share in the romance," he says, looking apologetically at Gertrude, and appealingly at Kate. "I acted under a mistaken impression, for her good, as I thought at the time. I shall wish I had held my tongue," he adds peevishly, "if it's going to make anything like a misunderstanding between us;" and the look he gives Gertrude, as he concludes his sentence, convinces her that he is quite ready to be led to the altar by her, and to surrender his will to hers, for awhile at least, probably until the novelty of having her for his wife shall have worn off.

There is an air of expectancy and confusion about the whole party. Kate feels that to attempt anything like an explanation now will be to put herself into a hopelessly wrong place. As for the Forests, they feel angry and mortified. In the first place, her mere appearance to-day is a blemish on their spotlessness. In the second place, she is the cause of Clement Graham appearing to great

disadvantage; and Gertrude knows that her quick-witted sister Marian will remember each little shade of manner that falls short of manliness. "Marian will laugh at him and mimic him to Frank," poor Gertrude feels prophetically; "and he was going on so well till Kate came in." Gertrude has an eye for the ridiculous and the awkward to the full as keen as that of her brother and sister. But, in the case of Clement Graham, she is quite prepared to be charitably blind, and to take up the burden of being perpetually on guard over his words and actions, should she ever occupy the proud and happy position of being his wife.

"I am sure Kate has a good story to tell us," Mrs. Forest says, making a slight diversion by means of entangling her fan, pocket-handkerchief, and eye-glass in one another, and, by pantomime, requiring everybody's aid towards disentangling the same. Kate's appearance on the boards of the family is very inopportune this day; but

she is "one of them," after all. But Kate remains passive.

"It was all nothing; nothing but a joke, 'pon my word," Graham says, with another of those little, thin hee-heeing laughs which are even more contemptible than maudlin tears in a man.

"It was no joke at all, Aunt Marian; I tell you what it was to me then, the overthrow of every bright hope that I had in life, and ever since it has been fetters to my feet, and a clog round my neck," Kate says, rising up, with a weird, vague feeling that after all, perhaps, she had been Quixotic in denouncing herself when it would have been so easy to remain passive, and to suffer them to flounder about in a boundless, fathomless sea of conjecture.

She is her better self a moment after this regret has crossed her mind. Her higher nature revolts at the mere idea of taking refuge under cover of anything like a cowardly prevarication. "I will come the first day you can give me a hearing and

an hour, Aunt Marian," she says quietly. "Perhaps, after it, you will think worse of me. At any rate, you shall hear all the truth, and nothing beyond it."

"I do detest mysteries," Gertrude says, shrugging her shoulders and walking back to the piano; and Graham follows her, muttering—

"So do I. Mysteries and much ado about nothing are bad form, don't you know. Shall we try this once again." And the gallant young ex-officer proceeds to whine out, in a fluty tenor, a repetition of his former request, that some one will "meet him once again, and love him once again."

"Good-bye, Kate, my dear; come, of course, when it is quite convenient to you, and do remember that anything like a scene is especially unpleasant to me," she adds, in a lowered tone. "I have been very much shattered by Frank's affairs lately. I am ordered the most complete quiet. My doctor says that business cares and worries of all kinds are to be kept away from me;

therefore, if it's anything that I am not absolutely bound to hear, you see, you would be doing me a greater kindness by not confiding in me ?"

The words are not unkind; but the tone is utterly devoid of all heart or interest. Kate has gone to her family, yearning for sympathy, for love, for some sign that they care for her still. Her very soul aches at the reception they have given her, at the callousness of their manner; yet they have not said or done anything that is actually and definitely unkind. On the contrary, her cousins have given her fragrant tea in a most exquisitely-painted cup and saucer; and her aunt has requested that she will come and spend a nice, long, quiet day with them. What more can the heart of woman desire? What more can the common sense of a poor relation teach her to expect?

Nevertheless, she does presently go out from their midst, with a strangely sad and forlorn feeling of being alone and uncared for; of its being of little consequence to

any human being whether or not she ever reaches those clean and cheap, but painfully dull, lodgings. Even as this feeling is weighing her down, she forces herself to remember her resolution of the previous night, and she repeats it with emphasis that is bracing as sea-air to her shaken nerves.

"Whatever comes to my hand to do, I'll do it with such a will as shall employ me fully, and save me from the pangs of retrospection," she says vigorously; and the mere force of the words nerves and stimulates her on to the better fulfilment of the weary task of mere endurance. What would she give now for one strong, reassuring clasp of the hand, one manly word of counsel and comfort, from the only man who knows exactly to what degree she has been sinned against, and to what degree she has sinned against others! "But he has left her 'in doubt,' too," she thinks, and oh! the anguish there is for her in the reflection that, during that brief interview of the previous night, she was lowered in his estimation, and had

drifted miles apart from him. "At any rate, he knows the worst of me," she repeats to herself in a paroxysm of pain; "he knows my worst and my best."

There is a great deal to be gone through in the process of this entire relinquishment of any right to him—of the belief that he desires to have any right to her. "All through his life, whenever he thinks of me at all, he will think of me as a foolish, feckless person, who was wafted about by her own wayward will, without any regard to any fixed principle whatever." She thinks this in bitter self-humiliation, for her soul is ground down to-night.

Poor girl! she would be in a better case if she were called upon to do something definitely good or difficult. But she is allowed by fate and circumstances to drift, with all the desire in the world to find that work placed before her which she shall be compelled to do. She cannot see it. So she gropes on in the dark—helpless, blind, and unhappy—terribly, pitiably alone!

The Forests have a great talent for keeping things smooth, and for putting men at ease with themselves and others. They see that Clement Graham is much ruffled by this little passage of arms with Kate, and their womanly intuitions tell them that he is not a man who is likely to come again to a house where he has been so ruffled, unless he has full assurance that it shall never happen again. Accordingly, instead of dropping the subject of Kate, and so vainly attempting to make him forget her—as less adroit manœuvrers would have done—Mrs. Forest and Gertrude speak about her openly, and say what a pity it is that her profession is one that virtually separates her from them entirely, and that they are sorry to see that she has developed a morbid sensitiveness which prevents her taking any pleasure in coming to them, or their taking any pleasure in having her company. "I have asked her to come and spend a quiet day with us," Mrs. Forest says, "but I can see that she doesn't wish to come, therefore I shall let the

subject drop." As she announces her resolve, she heaves a gentle sigh of disappointed and rejected affection, and Clement Graham asks —"You never did know much of Miss Mervyn, did you?"

"We never knew her at all until she came to stay with us last year, and then I am sorry to say she was the cause of a great deal of misery to our poor dear May," Mrs. Forest says, with a softly deprecating movement of the head. Ever since her daughter-in-law had the discretion to die, Mrs. Forest has publicly spoken of her in terms of tenderness and affection, that fall as gracefully from her lips as if they were genuine.

"I heard that Frank was very sweet on his cousin; she always was a girl to carry on with any fellow who would carry on with her, don't you know," said Clement Graham, giving way to his effeminate desire to pick holes in the moral vestment of any absent person who might be under discussion. "When I knew her at Torquay—at least I didn't know her, but I knew who

she was—she was flirting as hard with Bellairs as any girl could. She left all the Plymouth garrison hacks, who had been trained to the business, lengths behind; there was nothing like her." He quite warms into eloquence, and is cooled down again to his normal state of peevish suspicion by Gertrude saying, with an air of unmistakable jealousy—

"Flirting with Captain Bellairs! He has had plenty of opportunities of renewing the flirtation if he had pleased, for he met her here when he had that bad accident; but we saw no signs of it, did we, mamma?" Gertrude reserves her own knowledge on the subject, communicated to her in confidence by Captain Bellairs.

"It would be an excellent match for her, and I am sure we should all rejoice in it," the wary mother replies warningly, for she fears that the soupçon of jealousy in Gertrude's tone may be detected by the man who is still free to take the offer of his hand and fortune elsewhere.

"They say there's no chance of that," Clement Graham goes on. "I hear that he has been hanging about after that pretty widow, Mrs. Angerstein, a good deal lately; and she was the one that there was a story about with Bellairs some years ago, don't you know."

His delight in his own prowess as a narrator of aught that is unfavourable to another is so vigorous and clearly to be seen, that Gertrude blushes with shame for him now, and trembles with anticipation of the little dramatic scene which Marian will make of it for Frank's benefit.

The shake of the hand which she gives him, when he takes his departure, is so cold and constrained that the others notice it. Nevertheless, this sense of his shortcomings which her sister has displayed does not melt Marian's spirit, nor tie Marian's tongue, when they are alone.

"Gerty, dear," she begins, "what an amusing husband you will have! He will never let you be dull; when he has thrown

mud on all your friends and acquaintances, he will be able to come nearer home and malign his own mother, and mamma, and me; and when every one else fails he can suspect you, my dear, and his own daughters if you have any."

"Don't be bitter, and think you're witty," Gertrude says crossly; and then the genuine sisterly affection which is at the bottom of this badinage crops up.

"Gertrude," Marian says, leaning her arms on her sister's shoulders and kissing her affectionately, "don't think of marrying that man; let him and his money go. I declare, though I have no special call for the work, I'd rather turn washerwoman than be tied for life to that mean-natured, peevish, suspicious little wretch; you can't like him?"

"I don't like him."

"Fancy listening to his spite about any one dear to you; fancy his saying a series of spiteful things about me, for instance; why, Gerty, you couldn't endure it. Poor Frank

sacrificed himself, and we have seen the end of that."

"I don't like him," Gertrude replies, "but the less I say the better, for I shall marry him."

CHAPTER XIV.

FRANK AT HOME.

THERE is a good deal of comfort in every part of Frank Forest's home, save in that portion of it which he—the nominal master of the house—occupies. The supreme baby gives rise, as it were, to hitherto uninvented wants, that appear to be insatiable on the part of her army of supervisors and attendants. That the harmless infant should be well and carefully cherished and nourished has been Frank's earnest prayer and desire, from that moment when conscience smote him on hearing of the death of his wife. But it is only human on his part that he should occasionally smite his breast (mentally) in his agony at the boredom and the badgering of which that child is the cause,

and ask himself, "Three cows and three nurses may be essential to its well being, but that the cows and the nurses should be supplemented by Mrs. Constable and Mrs. Grange, is a Nemesis that could never have been designed by a just Providence."

There is a comical side to his domestic difficulties and distresses, when they are looked at by uninterested outsiders. He is made so "comfortably" miserable! He is never permitted to catch cold, or to run the risk of catching cold, by indulging in open windows, even in his own study, after the hour at which Mrs. Constable avows "night chills" set in. He is carefully supervised as to his nocturnal incomings and outgoings, and made to feel very sorry for himself, and them, if ever he unwarily brings home any of his Bohemian friends.

This final fall which Kate has given him, by her open renunciation of every other than a kindly, cousinly right in him, has made him much less strong in the battle, even than he had been beforehand. The

doubt of its being worth while to battle on monotonously for the maintenance of a family respectability that merely oppresses him, is very strongly before him. Day by day his endeavours to do so relax, and day by day the well munitioned armies of his jealously affectionate and lovingly domineering invaders have him more and more surely on the hip, as far as building up justifiable evidence against him goes. Evidence which, when the time is ripe for them to proclaim themselves right, and Frank wrong, will carry all the right-thinking portion of the world with them. For the right-thinking portion of the world do not see the Constable clans marching on to victory, waving the baby as a flag of defiance before them, nor do they hear the words of undeniable but most irritating wisdom which they pour plenteously into his ears.

Some weeks have passed since that humiliating hour when he heard from Kate's own lips that she had left off caring for him with the feeling of old, with that feeling

which had appealed so strongly to the sentimental and passionate side of his nature. It is true that when he might have won her, when to have been taken by him would have been her joy and glory, and when to be left by him was a most stinging shame to her, he had chosen the latter alternative. He had quietly left her, to suit his own pocket and convenience. Now that he is suffering for his choice, he is ready enough to cry *mea culpa*, and entreat that Kate will love him once again, and aid him in freeing his territories from the feminine invaders who make life odious to him. But Kate has taught him the sharp lesson that love, once dead, cannot be resuscitated.

The depressing conviction, too, is dawning upon him, that he is a less popular man than he was formerly. In the old bright days of his success, a certain love of sway and of dogmatism which are inherent in his nature were so embroidered and enriched by the light, laughing, sunny cheeriness and heartiness which grew out of that success,

that all men liked him and forbore to remember that he resented opposition, and insisted on reigning alone in the majority of social marts. He had his own way, and he carried things before him with a certain amount of swing, with a free fascinating *débonair* assumption of its being his right, that made other men even forget for the time that it was nothing of the kind. But with the failing of his success, had come the loss of much of his popularity, socially as well as in literature. Dogmatic assertions from a man who smiles winningly, and laughs gaily at you while he dogmatizes, are very different from dogmatic assertions from a man who scowls at you, and shows you he does not care a bit whether or not you agree with his views. The cares of his home life, the anxieties concerning his magazine while it lingered on, drove him to his club constantly, and made him very disagreeable while he was there. This naturally made other men hold aloof from him; and this again reacted on him in such a

manner as to soon make the once popular Frank Forest about the best disliked man in London.

In common with many another highly gifted man, Frank Forest, under disadvantageous circumstances, unites the intensely keen vanity of a woman with the morbidly acute sensitiveness of a disappointed man. He smarts, aches under the sense of his own unpopularity, yet he never makes the slightest effort to retrieve, by a resumption of his old manner, the position he has lost. Under these conditions, he tries his home life now and again, attempts to work, to write something that will compel the public to acknowledge that he has not exhausted that special vein of dry irony and somewhat bitter humour, for which he was at first so remarkable. He makes the effort; but alas! the old feeling that whatever he wrote would be liked, is gone, and he has no Kate now to urge him on by openly glorying in him.

Nevertheless, in spite of these damping

feelings, he strives to struggle through the mists of gloom, which he also strives to think are but temporary. He sets himself down to his work at home, steadily ignores the idea of the family, and prepares to assert himself as the master of the house, if they in any way attempt to thwart him as a wilful boy, or swaddle his endeavours as if they were those of an irresponsible infant.

The new regime has been established about a week. For many hours of every day the master of the house may actually be found at home in his study, and, up to the present time, he has maintained possession of it undisturbed. His literary avocations do not, however, render him more amenable to the patronizing advances which his late wife's family make towards him, when they do meet, at certain high social festivals. On the contrary, he is quite as self absorbed, if not quite as gloomy, as he was before he began working so hard. Consequently, they decide,

in full family conclave, that his devices, though not wicked, are not such as he should be left to undisturbed. "His present course estranges him from us, quite as effectually as his Bohemian friends," Mr. Grange says, in a tone that is intended to be earnestly affectionate, for the sake of impressing his mother-in-law, but which only succeeds in being fussy and inquisitive; "I can't imagine why he can't content himself with what he has got, and our pleasant home-circle." Mr. Grange gives his mother-in-law a glance that he surcharges with all the family feeling in his being, as he says this, and trusts in humble faith, that by reason of it, he will be remembered ever so much more fully in her will.

His house is capitally ordered. Not even in the days of May did things move on with greater order and decency than they do now. In fact, it is against this extreme order and decency that Frank partially revolts. It is all of an elderly tame nature.

There is nothing about which he has actual cause of complaint. As a moderately humane young British father, he has no fierce desire to make his baby cough by smoking in its borders, or to kill it by disturbing its nurses by walking quietly into his house at night. But he does mind about being perpetually told about these things in warning accents, and he feels that the reign of youth is over in his house, and that those of infancy and crabbed age have set in.

The burden laid upon him has been specially hard to bear this day. Mrs. Constable, with a great air of knowing he doesn't want her, and still being ready to forgive his ingratitude, wicked as it is, has followed him into his study with the tale of a doubt and a difficulty that has arisen as to the younger nurse. It is a terrible doubt! still, in spite of its terrors, there are alleviating circumstances about it; for Mrs. Constable is one of the good old virtuous school, who really thoroughly enjoy the privilege of throwing

stones at a fallen sinner—who has fallen and been found out. But the difficulty is one that really disturbs her, for the all-powerful baby, not having learned to discriminate between good and evil, loves the suspected girl, and howls when parted from her.

"Oh! keep the girl, and have done with it," Frank says impatiently, when Mrs. Constable has repeated her story six times with variations.

"It's easy to say that, Frank, very easy for you——"

"And easy for you to do it, I should think," he interrupts.

"You have no sense of responsibility about that girl," she proceeds, settling to her work in a way that appals him.

"Not in the least, about that girl," Frank says; and as he says it his eyes wander from Mrs. Constable to the door, and he gives other indications of being intensely anxious to get rid of her, and to go on filling up those blank pages which are lying temptingly before him.

Mrs. Constable is vexed about the domestic difficulty, she is likewise ecstatically alive to anything that may be construed into a slight to her or indifference towards her on Frank's part, by reason of the lavish, not to say slavish, attentions her other son-in-law has been heaping upon her lately. Vexation and the hysterical ecstacy combine to put her into what some women call "such a nervous state," in other words, a fuming, futile pet. Under the influence of this feeling she speaks with more sound than sense, with more vigour than discretion.

"Oh! I know that I am not wanted, Frank, now, or at any other time; you let me see that plainly enough; only, as your brother says, with tears in his eyes——"

"My what?" Frank asks, in angry amazement.

"Your brother; you don't suppose that Grange would stay here, week after week, as he does, away from the comforts of his own house (and he is a man, let me tell you, Frank, who thoroughly appreciates the exer-

tions his wife makes to secure that comfort) unless he considered you in the light of a brother, and felt the strong need you have of saving family influences about you."

Frank vouchsafes no other reply to this than a remark that is expressive of very bad wishes for Mr. Grange's consideration.

"I wish you would sometimes remember that you have a great deal to answer for," Mrs. Constable says: "left by our precious May as the sole parent of that dear infant upstairs——"

"I'm thankful to hear she is upstairs," Frank says surlily; "as a rule, she and her surroundings pervade the house in a way that is utterly subversive of a fellow's ever clearing his brain, and doing any decent work."

Mrs. Constable is a little shaken in her position; still she clings to it, knowing that presently she will be backed up by the presence of the Granges.

They advance to her rescue before Frank has had time to do more than fume, and

fidget, and look at Mrs. Constable again as if he wished her to be gone. Really, considering how unutterably mean their side of the situation is, they maintain it with a certain amount of tact. Mrs. Grange comes into the room that is dearer to Frank than anything else in the house, with some wifely looking work in her hand, as if she took it for granted that Frank would be delighted to see her sit down and do it there. Mr. Grange has a cigar in his mouth, though smoking disagrees with him direfully. Indeed, they take him so completely for granted, that Frank, for a few bewildered moments, is in as great a state of doubt as to his own identity, as was the old woman who avowed—

> "If I be I—as I suppose I be,
> I've a little dog at home, and he'll know me."

Poor Frank has not even the little dog to rely upon. He has only himself, and he knows himself to be but a rotten stick to rely on, when anything like moral courage is concerned. He rises and paces the room

savagely for a few moments, while Grange enlarges upon the advantages of sitting in a room that has a good, full, strong light in it —Frank by preference always writing in one that is well darkened.

"I find myself," Mr. Grange declares, "that my ideas are always clearer—and brighter I may say—in a room from which the light of day is not excluded. My dear Frank, you must let us re-arrange this room for you; a few magic touches from my little woman here, and you'll find your room won't look the same thing."

Mr. Grange playfully pats his little woman on the shoulder as he speaks, and even she looks aghast at him, for he is not accustomed to adventure upon such public demonstrations of patronizing affection before people. Mr. Grange is an infinitely smaller man than his wife, who is pronounced, not to say largely aggressive, in style. A woman whose dresses are large, and who fills a great deal of space in a room, should never submit to be called "my little woman," or by any other endear-

ing diminutive, unless she would see the person who calls her so made to look eminently ridiculous.

"I have no doubt I shouldn't know my room," Frank says surlily; "the chances are that I shouldn't like it either; so perhaps Mrs. Grange will have the goodness to reserve her magic touches for some one who will appreciate them more highly."

"When we wish to do everything for your happiness, for the sake of the dear one who is gone," Mrs. Constable says, in a tone of pious spite, "it is a pity that you should rudely rebuff us; we are willing to forget many things and make you one of us still——"

Mrs. Constable pauses, overcome by angry emotion, and Mrs. Grange takes up the parable.

"Don't say we are willing to forgive many things, mamma," she says; "I don't think that Frank has ever done anything that we need wish to forget."

She looks rather kindly at her brother-in-

law as she speaks, and there is really an accent of generosity in her words. She knows well that they, "the family," hold the winning cards in their hands; and as she takes broader views than her mother, she deems it unwise to goad the unlucky man beyond endurance with pin-pricks. In truth, she has her own ideas about Frank and his future. Her husband is the brother of an unprovided-for sister, and if Frank Forest can be brought low enough to be made to meekly accept Charlotte Grange, Mrs. Grange feels that she will have done her duty nobly, at no cost to herself. Moreover, May's money will be kept in the family channel, even during Frank's life.

"And if I may be allowed to speak," Mr. Grange says, bringing all the emotion of which he is master to his aid, "I should think that no man could be indifferent to any interest manifested in him by a dear good mother like yourself."

"If my study is to be turned into the family wailing place, I'd better shut up the

idea of working here altogether," Frank says, flinging himself down in a chair, stretching his legs out, and sticking his hands in his pockets, with a savagely defiant air that makes little Mr. Grange almost leap in the air.

"Now pray, pray don't make our coming in here, once—our taking the liberty of coming once into a room that our poor dear May took such an interest in, that she choose every bit of furniture in it herself—the excuse for your going off to any of the old occupations and companions. That, I am sure, never added to your comfort or respectability, Frank," Mrs. Constable says, and her face gets very red, and the tears well freely out of her eyes as she says it.

"I am sure that Frank has too much taste, and too much good feeling, and real affection for us all, mamma, for that caution to be necessary," Mrs. Grange says, with emphasis; and she resolves that, without delay, she will bring Charlotte into their midst, and let that unprovided-for one work

her will with the widower, who will be wealthy again, if he be only well looked after.

"I believe you mean kindly," Frank says, a little less gloomily, to his sister-in-law, "but the fact is, I am out of gear; I think I want a change."

"A little change of air would do us all good," Mrs. Grange says; "your sister wants me to take her somewhere," she adds to her husband. So the thin edge of the wedge is got in.

CHAPTER XV.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF RATHER.

"THERE is very little real gratitude in this world, and I have lived long enough to cease to expect it from most people; still, considering all things, I think I am justified in saying, that it will be unprecedented ingratitude on your part, if you ever forget that I have been the means of bringing you out of obscurity, and putting you in the way of gaining a splendid position."

"I have an excellent memory."

The first speaker is Mrs. Grange. The second is Charlotte, the unprovided-for sister of Mr. Grange, and the projected Fate of poor Frank Forest.

A few words will suffice to put her before you. A woman of five-and-twenty, with

brown hair, and eyes of precisely the same colour, each brightened by a golden shade. A face whose oval is spoilt by the massive squareness of the lines of the lower part of the face. A girl with a firm, fine figure, just escaping being short, and with a quiet steady expression of face that betrays nothing.

The conversation takes place in the young lady's bed-room, in Frank Forest's house, the morning after her arrival. She has obeyed a hasty and somewhat mysterious summons from her sister-in-law, and come up from the wildest part of the lake country; and now Mrs. Grange has just succeeded in making the situation clear to her. Charlotte fully understands that she is to conquer and marry this unknown Frank Forest. She also understands that, when married to him, she is to employ his wealth chiefly as if she were Mrs. Grange's steward.

She has listened very patiently to all her patroness has been good enough to put before her: has listened with a fixed attention that

Mrs. Grange thinks is very respectful and pleasant: and has already made up her mind as to her course of action. She will follow Mrs. Grange's advice: she will be guided by that lady's precepts to exactly that point to which it is agreeable and expedient to herself to go. At that point she will stop, and fifty thousand Mrs. Granges will not drag her out of the groove which she deems the best for herself. However, all these resolutions of hers are masked under her imperturbable manner, and Mrs. Grange is perfectly satisfied.

"You will find him rather brusque and hard in his manner at times," Mrs. Grange goes on, "but disregard that, my dear. May was a trifle ungracious with him, she used to insist on asking for 'explanations' at every turn; now, that is always foolish while a girl is only engaged to a man; when she is married it is different, if, as in May's case, she holds the position of the one who gives all and gains nothing. Now, in your case I should recommend—but really I am counting

my chickens before they are hatched, and it's quite time you were up, so I'll leave you to dress."

"I am rather tired—" the girl is beginning, but Mrs. Grange stops her.

"Tired! Nonsense, Charlotte; do you want to give him the impression of your being out of health or lazy at once? Men always think you are one or the other if you stay in bed to breakfast," Mrs. Grange says, striding towards the door, and twirling her draperies about her in her usual overpowering way. "No, no; get up, and let him see that you can stand the strong morning light. Your complexion is not to be compared to poor dear May's, but it's very good of its kind, and it's a point you ought not to neglect."

Miss Charlotte Grange listens patiently and without a change of countenance to this harangue, but as soon as the door is closed behind her brother's wife, she laughs in a noiseless way that would be infinitely disagreeable to any honest person to hear.

"My honoured preceptress and sister is a hard task-mistress," she says to herself. "Oh, how I hate getting up early! oh, how I hate being told to do anything!"

Expression enough comes into the hitherto passionless face as she says this. It is pitiable to think of the long sustained system of suppression that must have been exercised over this woman's nature, before she can have arrived at this pass of hypocrisy.

As she dresses she counts monotonously over and over again the long years which have elapsed since the death of her parents —the long years during which she has been the recipient of the bounty that has been doled out to her by her brother.

"It's not his fault, the poor mouse-hearted creature," she thinks contemptuously; "it's that big, overbearing, swaggering wife of his who does all the meannesses, and calls upon me to thank her for them as if they were magnificences. Fancy her trying to teach me how to please and attract a man! when I have been playing the game, with more or

less success, ever since I knew that to win it was my only chance of freedom!"

She has subdued all appearance of the discontent and impatience that is eating into her very soul by the time she reaches the breakfast-room, when she is introduced in a very casual kind of way to her gloomy young host. Mrs. Grange has already said to him—

"As we are all going away so soon, I thought you wouldn't mind my sister-in-law Charlotte being here for a few days, Frank. She's a very quiet girl, and excessively useful to me." To this Frank has responded—

"I don't think I care very much who's here now. Thank Heaven, I shall not be here myself much longer!"

There is not a particle of affectation in the utter indifference which Frank betrays to the presence of the new comer. He reads his letters and papers, he pursues his path among the broils and toasts, just as though she were not exactly opposite to him, with the full light of day pouring in upon her golden-tinged hair and speckless, smooth, white skin.

Presently he comes upon a note that makes him wrinkle his brow, and give vent to an impatient exclamation. Then he rises, rings the bell, and when it is answered, says—

"I shall be at home to luncheon to-day. A gentleman is coming here; just see that everything is all right."

Mrs. Constable waits till the servant has withdrawn, and then makes a tearful protest.

"You needn't have taken the trouble to give your own orders, Frank, now I am here."

He almost groans. For one wildly blissful moment he has forgotten that fact, and now that it is recalled to him he does not appear grateful for his privileges.

"It's a confounded nuisance," he says. "Bellairs has written to say he'll come here to lunch, and I can't send him a telegram to go to the club. Just like him; confound him."

"This is much the more proper place for him to come," Mrs. Constable begins; and Mr. Grange chimes in—

"Don't think that we shall object at all, my dear fellow; happy little family party as we are, we can't expect that our circle will always remain unbroken."

Frank is on the brink of a retort that would, if uttered, have brought about a climax of some unseemly sort or other, when his eyes light on the face of the stranger within his gates, and he pulls himself up. For on that face is written, in legible characters, whatever of scorn of meanness, of indignation against impertinence which the owner can feel. Truly that silent face can speak well at times!

"Are you very tired after your journey, or was it a short one?" he asks courteously, as they all rise from the table, and he lounges round nearer to where she is standing.

"It was long, and I am so tired that the effort to open my mouth to speak is almost too great a one for me to make," she says, making no attempt to conceal her utter weariness, though Mrs. Grange winks and blinks at her.

"A turn or two in the fresh air in the garden will do you all the good in the world, Charlotte," her brother says, fussing up to her. "Come, get your hat, my dear. Frank, will you stroll out with us?"

Mr. Grange speaks with a jocular assumption of being altogether in the right place, and in the position of one who is able to offer a very pleasant diversion for the passing hour to his anything but affable young host. Evidently there is a certain amount of pride in his pretty sister bubbling up in the depths of Mr. Grange's shallow and chilly heart. As evidently his pretty sister is not disposed to second him in his endeavours to make Frank feel that all the power and glory is on his side only.

"You were always fond of arranging everything for everybody," she says in her quiet voice. "I used to call you Director-General of the Kingdom of Lilliput, if you remember."

"Your brother always spoils you," Mrs. Grange says, coming into their midst like

a surging wave. Between her desire to put Charlotte in a becoming light before Frank, and her keen, wifely wish to snub the "other woman" who dares to snub her (Mrs. Grange's) lawful prey, she is "given much discontent," as Pepys would say.

"The atmosphere of the garden is at least freer than that of this room," Frank says, with a laugh that is half at the transparent tactics of the Granges, and half at himself for submitting to be the victim, even in appearance, of these tactics for a moment. But this new chain which they are striving to bind about his feet is in the guise of an attractive and intelligent looking woman, and poor Frank had been debarred from intercourse with all such for so long a time.

They are still loitering about the open French window. Charlotte is still lingering (judiciously) before she gets her hat, and takes Frank into the solitude of the garden, when there comes a sound of woe and lamentation from the housekeeper's room, which is directly opposite to the breakfast

room. The excellent cook and housekeeper, who had glorified poor May's brief domestic reign, fights hard with the interloping family whenever cause of fight seems to be justifiable. According to her lights it is justifiable whenever Mrs. Constable gives a superfluous order, and Mrs. Constable gives superfluous orders with marvellous perseverance every day of her life.

There is strife and enmity between these two rival powers now. Jealously as the housekeeper guards her sacred books on most occasions, there are moments when the wariest relax their vigilance, and Mrs. Constable has taken advantage of such a moment now, to discover that the increase in the household expenditure is steady and swift. She is no confiding, easily gulled young creature like May, who was always ready to believe that several pounds of butter, sugar, and other ingredients were required for the formation of one pound cake. Mrs. Constable has been accustomed to fight the battle against the extortioners over and over

again ; and though her enemy fires a heavy volley of verbal shot into her now, the spirit of the British matron rises equal to the occasion, and she shrilly repeats her belief in the fact of there being "something wrong somewhere," in a way that tells the housekeeper that it is a forlorn hope she is leading against that "being interfered with," which is as chains and slavery to the proud spirit of the peculating retainer.

There is nothing fleshy or buxom about Edwards, as she is called. She is spare, sallow, severe in aspect, and richly endowed with that spitefully suppressed manner which sometimes renders an inferior so all-powerful. She crosses the hall now, books in hand, full a pace in front of angry, rosy, confused Mrs. Constable, who really feels sore to the very core of her heart that her dear dead May's money should be wasted so scandalously.

"If you are the master here, sir," Edwards begins, with an air of respectful pity that strongly inclines Frank to knock her down,

"I wish you would say once for all, sir, what my duties are, and what they are not. I engaged to fulfil certain duties, and, as is well known to you, sir, them duties I always did fulfil satisfactorily until others came in here as I didn't know I was to be accountable to; and so I should be glad to hear what I am to do, and what my puzzition is."

"To mind your own business, and not bother me," Frank says hastily; and he has nearly escaped through the open window, when he is pulled up with a jerk by Mrs. Constable.

"It's all very well for you to be careless and indifferent, and to give your orders in a grand way, Frank," she pants; "but when you suffer from being robbed and cheated, you'll thank me for trying to look after things a little for you, and not back that person up in her insolence to me; it's not that I benefit by what I do or try to do," the poor harassed lady continues, as distinctly as the tears—which have all the effect of a cold in the head upon her—will

allow her to speak, "but wilful waste is wickedness, and to shut our eyes to being robbed, is nearly as bad as robbing others; and if Mrs. Edwards can look me honestly in the face and say she doesn't see that you are being robbed by some one, I'll——"

"For mercy's sake manage as you please, and don't drive me mad between you," Frank says, breaking the moral checkstring which has held him during this exposition of feeling and principle, and getting clear away into the garden. Then, as Miss Grange follows him, Edwards clasps her books closer to her heart, and marches back to her own room, from whence she issues orders to her subordinates respecting the luncheon, that drive Mrs. Constable to desperation.

"He won't put out a hand to check the tide of extravagance himself, and he won't strengthen yours when he sees it put out on his behalf," Mr. Grange says, with sympathetic indignation that could be subdued in an instant if Frank re-entered the room

unexpectedly. Mr. Grange never for a moment forgets that his beloved mother-in-law has a large fortune entirely at her own disposal, and that her own son, though he is a prig, is far too conscientious to seek to secure aught unto himself by unfair means.

"The truth is, mamma," Mrs. Grange says, "it was never designed by nature that a young man should be twiddled round an old woman's finger. Frank is not the kind of man out of whom one can manufacture a molly-coddle."

"I think that if your husband were similarly situated, he would not show such contemptuous indifference to the exertions I make for his good," Mrs. Constable says resentfully, for in her heart of hearts she does not like being called an "old woman;" "though it's far from her," she always avers, "to wish to pass for a girl."

"I dare say he wouldn't," Mrs. Grange says carelessly, "but Frank is different; come, mamma, make up your mind to it;

'young blood will have its day;' we must all make up our minds to see Frank taking to another life and another wife."

Mrs. Grange says out her sentence bravely, but her husband glances from her to her mother with nervous celerity. The plan of mating Frank to his sister is very pleasant to Mr. Grange, for he does groan over the onus that is on him of providing that young person with food and raiment. But if Mrs. Constable disapproves of it he will be in peril indeed; a helpless bark floating rudderless, between the Scylla of his wife and the Charybdis of her mother.

"Nonsense!" Mrs. Constable says sharply. "One wife and one husband is all it was ever intended that decent men and women should have in this world." Mrs. C. speaks as if she has a hazy notion that matrimonial arrangements may be on a broader scale in the next. "Besides," she goes on, "with that dear baby upstairs, what can he want with another wife? I shall not be at all pleased if you put such notions in his head,

or opportunities in his path." And Mrs. Constable, as she brings her declaration to a conclusion, looks suspiciously at her daughter, and curiously into the garden, where the host and his young guest are sauntering among the shrubs on the lawn.

"Charlotte will think I am neglecting her," Mr. Grange says jauntily, with the hope that Mrs. Constable will not think him accessory to the evil deed of setting his sister as a trap for Frank. Then he goes out uncomfortably, for he knows that Charlotte's organ of veneration has never been properly developed as far as he is concerned, and that she is quite capable of so clearly letting him see that he is not wanted if she does not want him, that he will have no alternative but to come in again.

Meanwhile Frank and Charlotte Grange have taken the whole round of the garden once in perfect silence. There is a sense of relief to them both in the perception each has that the other does not want to talk or to be talked to. At the conclusion of that

first round he stops by a seat that encircles the trunk of a copper beech, and says—

"How utterly you're unlike your brother! Isn't it rather strange that during the whole term of my connection with the family I never heard of you till yesterday?"

"Then I have been thrust upon you unawares?" she says.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON A LOWER ROUND OF THE LADDER.

From that day on which she was evidently inopportune in the family circle, up to this one on which she comes to the dreary conclusion that she is inopportune in the world altogether, Kate Mervyn has seen nothing of, and heard nothing from, the kin who are so far less kind to her. The invitation to spend the nice quiet day with the Forests has never arrived, and she lacks the heart and the audacity to thrust herself among them uninvited again. Nevertheless, cut off as she is from social intercourse with her fellow-creatures, for Kate has not made any new friends, the time has not hung heavy on her hands. Indeed, on the contrary, day follows day with ghastly rapidity, it appears,

for each day brings its own wants, and she has not the means of supplying them. The labour she is bestowing on the long story with which she hopes to make a certain meed of success by-and-by, is incompatible with the production of pot-boilers, as they are technically termed. While the grass is growing the steed is starving.

Economize as grindingly as she will, there is still a daily outlay going on that is ruinous to her, yet her heart is so much in her work that she cannot induce herself to put it aside, to weaken or get rusty, in order that she may manufacture more immediately marketable wares. She tries for a long time to keep her eyes fixed on the goal she wants to gain, and to avert them from the innumerable disagreeables and trials that are incessantly about her path. But at length she can do this no longer. She has denied herself everything that is not supremely needful, and now the hour has come when denial is of no avail. Full of the supreme hopelessness which moneylessness engenders, she is com-

pelled to turn her attention to those columns of the daily papers in which the wants of the wealthy are advertised; and the result of her unwilling venture into this fresh field is that she presently finds herself engaged, at a liberal salary, as companion to an invalid lady in the south of Ireland.

All the passionately intense love of change which is a portion of her nature, and perhaps her richest inheritance (for by reason of it she extracts more pleasure from life than can be imagined by those who are not endowed with it), comes to the fore and vitalizes and invigorates her as she sets forth on the new path. As she steps on to the deck of the steamer that is to convey her from Holyhead to Dublin she is quite ready to bid a joyous farewell to the old romance, quite ready to marvel at herself, for that she was ever ready to be cast down by the failure of it. In her sanguine eyes the future looms very brightly. It will all be new—scenery, society, interest, everything in fact. Novelty, and my book to finish in a fresh atmosphere,

she says to herself; and with the consciousness that these two elements of pleasure are absolutely in her own possession, for her to enjoy as intensely as she can, she goes down to the ladies' saloon beamingly, regardless of her almost empty purse and the rising storm.

The saloon is spacious, well fitted up, and would be comfortable if it were not thickly strewn with unhappy women who are already pale and prostrate under the shadow of the expectation of that curse of the sea, its sickness, falling upon them. They are lying prone all around her, three deep, tier upon tier of embodied pain and fear. With that perfect rendering up of herself to any new situation which is an attribute of hers, Kate suffers the stewardess to propel her into one of the lower berths; but a groan from a lady above dislodges her quickly, and she climbs to a top place, from whence she watches despair making rapid strides among her fellow passengers. But presently the thought of the freshness on deck contrasts too vividly

with the atmosphere below, and Kate descends in a lively way that causes a few disturbed ones to groan and hate her for being so well.

"I have followed your example," a quiet voice says, close behind her, as she steps out on the deck; and she looks round, and by the moonlight sees a pretty woman, in a becoming travelling suit of homespun, following her. There is something attractive to Kate in the perfect integrity which this lady has maintained in every portion of her toilet. Brief as has been the experience of those below of a life on the rolling deep, they have most of them become tangled as to the hair, and as limp as wet towels as to the figure. This neat trim young woman looks out with clear brown eyes that have a golden tinge over them, from under neatly-brushed glossy hair of the same colour. In fact, Charlotte Grange—for the young lady in homespun is no other than Mr. Grange's self-possessed sister—is fully determined to give Frank Forest a favourable impression of her personal

appearance under disadvantageous circumstances. He shall see that she is not one of those depressing people who become untied and unpinned and dusty, as soon as their foot is off their native heath. At any cost of trouble and Kalydor, of care and cosmetics, she will keep her gloss on during this trial trip which she is taking with Frank Forest sorely against his will.

"I heard a moaning mandate from my sister-in-law, to the effect that I should stay where I was, as I left the cabin," she says to Kate; "but I should have been overthrown as utterly as she is herself, if I had obeyed her. Is this the first time you have crossed?"

Kate answers her, and they go on conversing in an apparently frank and candid way. But somehow or other Kate finds that she has confided her position, her plans, and her prospects to her unknown fellow-traveller, before she has gained one particle of information respecting that fellow-traveller in return.

Secretiveness being a strongly marked characteristic of Miss Grange, and it being moreover one that has been fostered, and nourished, and cherished, by the circumstances that have surrounded her of late years, she finds herself very naturally despising Kate for that absence of reserve which has placed her past and present fully and fairly before a stranger.

"You love!" Charlotte Grange thinks, and that quiet smile of hers, which betrays no pain, and expresses no pleasure, passes over her face as she thinks it. "So you are that cousin of his who has been marked dangerous by the family; well I, wish as heartily as ever Constance de Beverley did, that my 'rival fair a saint in heaven might be;' if he sees you in the morning I shall be tempted to cry 'in vain, in vain,' as far as my journey goes."

They sleep a little at odd intervals during the night, but chiefly keep awake and exchange a few words now and again, being attracted towards one another by an

undefinable feeling that is neither sympathy nor liking, but that has something to do with that fascination of repulsion which one human being frequently exercises over another. They are each anxious, for widely different reasons, for the day to dawn and the voyage to end. Kate, whose ideas about Ireland and the Irish have been gathered chiefly from "Moore's Melodies" and Harry Bellairs, pants for the first sight, and the first impressions of its emerald glades and its chivalrous sons. Charlotte Grange is anxiously expectant as to the result of the meeting, which she fears is inevitable, between the man who may assure her prosperity and the woman who may deprive her of it.

"The sooner it's over, the sooner to rest," the philosophic intriguante thinks, as she takes a hasty glance at her own unruffled appearance in the little pocket-glass which she carries. "I shall make no struggle to avert anything, struggling is unbecoming and useless in these cases; but my prayer

is that she may, in her impatience, go on shore before that lazy Mr. Forest brings himself round to join us."

It may be that there is power in the unselfish piety of the prayer, or it may be only that Fortune feels pleasure in helping those who strive to help themselves. At any rate, Miss Grange's radiant eyes become more radiantly golden than usual, as she sees that Kate is one of the first to land at Kingstown, and that she buries herself instantly in the murky recesses of a second-class carriage.

Frank Forest, sauntering up presently, with a mixed feeling in his mind, that it is pleasant to be with quiet, good-looking, sensible Charlotte, and hateful to be in the atmosphere of her brother and sister-in-law, has no more notion than the insensible plank upon which he stands, that the only woman in the world that can make his heart throb is watching him from the window of the railway carriage. "Can he be married again? Can that perfect

piece of mechanism be my poor impulsive Frank's second choice?" Kate thinks pitifully. "Oh dear, if it is so, I shall have stronger doubts than ever as to the truth of the assertion, that marriages are made in heaven!"

Fortune befriends the Granges again at Dublin. Their bourne is Bray, the pretty watering-place which has obtained for itself the designation of the Brighton of Ireland. Frank's bourne is beyond Bray, at Captain Bellairs' place, which is set like a highly-polished gem of civilization in the heart of the wildly beautiful Wicklow mountains. It arranges itself naturally enough, and that without much pushing or coarse management on the part of Mr. Grange, that the well-appointed carriage, which Captain Bellairs has sent to meet Frank, shall convey them to Bray. The horses are well-bred, full of corn and fire, and they go off with a dash that sends the mud flying around them. Some of it spatters Kate, who is standing just outside the station door,

trying to keep half-a-dozen animated rag-bags, who are touting for outside cars, at bay; and, at the same time, striving to render up a lucid account of her luggage to eager and irrepressible porters.

Amidst cries of "Come along wid yourself," from various quarters, she finds herself aloft at length on what appears to her inexperience as a very perilous slope, on which she is compelled to assume the position of one on a side-saddle that has no pummels. Odours that rival in quality and quantity those of Cologne, assail her on every side, and reluctantly she relinquishes one of her illusions respecting the first flower of the earth and the first gem of the sea. She has been anticipating the spectacle of poverty and perhaps savagery in the byways, but in her imagination it was poverty and savagery of a picturesque order. But here in the highways squalor and pallid misery, decay in the rags that can never have been clothes, disease in the flesh that seems to have lost its life, meet her view.

Between the paroxysms of jerks which the motion of the car administers to her untutored frame, she sees her light escort of little Dublin Arabs, arrayed in holes that appear to be lightly linked together by a few rotten threads, alternately "horooshing" her palpable efforts to keep on this galvanic battery on wheels, and imploring her in the name of all the saints in the calendar for a penny. Gleams of broken windows, of choked-up gutters, flash upon her vision from either side. But, before she has time to be disheartened by all these strange surroundings, she is taken with a queer quick double-twist into Sackville Street, and landed at the door of the hotel at which she has been directed to wait until she is sent for by the invalid lady to whom she has pawned her time and talents for the ensuing twelvemonth.

At length the summons comes. A steady-looking old man-servant is shown into the room, from the window of which she has kept an amused eye upon the "bustle and

the raree-show" of the little world of Sackville Street. He has brought the carriage for her, he says; the open one, because Mrs. Durgan thought she would be liking to see the country. So she starts unconsciously in the wake of the cousin in whom she is still so honestly interested, and is driven away through miles of verdure till the Wicklow hills loom sternly above her, and she is set down at a house that nestles in a glade that is under the shadow of one of them, and that is called by the old name of Bray, Breagh Place.

It is a genuine Elizabethan mansion, standing in the midst of such masses of greenery as makes clear its claim to be one of the fairest portions of the emerald isle. "The Durgans have been here, father and son, since 1600," the old servant tells her; "and now the father is dead, and my lady has no son to leave it to, and it'll go to another name when she leaves us."

"It's beauty itself," Kate says warmly; at the same time her heart contracts. She

has pledged herself to stay here, "if she gives satisfaction;" in fact she has no other place to which to turn; but even in the first flush of her enthusiastic admiration, the solitariness of this "beauty itself" appals her. Then she tries to cast all fear and doubt behind her, tries to recall and reiterate her determination to do thoroughly and heartily whatever comes to her hand to do, and goes forward with a free, unhesitating step into the new life.

The hall is the key-note which determines the tone and tune of the house. This one at Breagh Place is arranged so that it gives a hearty welcome to every new comer. The carpet is nearly covered with the skins of stags—fat arm-chairs gape an invitation to be sat upon on every side—two or three sweet-eyed red setters with white feathered legs rise up and stretch themselves lazily, and wag affable tails—a wood fire burns brightly and lightly, and before it a little table is drawn up covered with hot rolls and coffee. Huge blue and white china

vases stand on either side of the hearth and on the buffet at the opposite end of the room, and these are filled with branches of pink monthly roses and long feathery fronds of fern. All her love of beauty and comfort, of art, and dogs, and flowers, surges up in her heart and forces her to exclaim that she hopes this may be her home for ever. As the words are spoken the door opens. A chair on wheels is run into the room, and a sweet, pale-faced woman with forget-me-not eyes holds a cordial hand out to the new comer, and endorses her wish that Breagh Place may be her home for ever.

The invalid lady is Mrs. Durgan herself, the mistress of the house; and all Kate's preconceived notions as to the fractiousness and general habits of self pity which are the portions of invalid ladies, vanish at sight of her. A bright-faced brunette with a smiling mouth, and eyes that match that mouth fairly, with a clear, ringing, healthy happy voice, and a hearty genial air of being glad that she herself and everybody

about her is alive. Her face is pale, as is only natural considering that her only exercise for the last eight months has been to be wheeled about in this chair. But there is no suspicion of sickliness or weariness about her.

"I wonder that anything so fresh and young as you are, consented to come and seclude yourself in these solitudes with a woman who might have been a poor paralytic, or a peevish hypochondriac, for anything you knew to the contrary," she says to Kate. "I am the victim—only the temporary victim I hope—of an accident. My right arm and right leg were badly broken some months since, so I can neither walk nor write; are you relieved?"

"Infinitely," Kate says promptly. Then she laughs a little confusedly, and adds—

"Perhaps for me it would have been better if you had been a peevish hypochondriac, for then I shouldn't have been interested away from my work by you. I should have done irksome duty stolidly, and

gone to my business for pleasure. Now with you——"

"What is your work?" Mrs. Durgan interrupts with quick, curious sympathy; and when Kate tells her, she says—

"I believe I know some one who knows you, Miss Mervyn; I believe——"

She pauses, and Kate asks—

"In what?"

"In Fate, Destiny, in—in—oh! in there being something very strange in store for us all; and in turn you must believe that whatever happens to any of us, I am very glad that I have been the means of bringing you to dear Kildare."

With all her national enthusiasm, Mrs. Durgan, now that Kate's "work" is understood by her, issues orders from her wheeled throne that quickly transform a room close to Kate's bed-room into a luxurious little study.

"If writing is made so easy to me I shall never write a line," Kate tells herself, as she sits down in the midst of the un-

accustomed comfort. "And even if I succeed in the mere writing, the matter produced will be so inferior to the conditions by which I am surrounded while producing it. It's impossible she can know any one who knows me, unless she is one of the many my poor fickle Frank adored before he adored me. I'll lead up to his name by speaking of his plays."

She finds her hostess out on a terraced flat in the rear of the house, with a dozen dogs leaping and rolling about her, and a handsome Irish chestnut mare standing by her side, eating bread and sugar from her hands, in as docile a way as if it had never gone like a wild cat at a hedge, and nearly killed its rider.

"This lively lady is the cause of my present condition," Mrs. Durgan says, patting her pet's glossy arched neck; "she played me false at a stone fence one day, and when we were picked up, I was found with the broken limbs I just mentioned; but we love each other, don't we, dear?"

The mare responded by a caressing movement of her handsome head, and Kate asks—

"What is her name? the darling! she's like a mare I had once."

"She was named by the person who gave her to me," Mrs. Durgan says, turning her head away; "he called her 'Guinevere.'"

A flush that makes her throb passes over Kate's face, but she resolves to make no more uncalled-for confidences, and so refrains from telling this frank new friend of hers what makes the name of Guinevere so inexpressibly interesting and dear to her. In order to turn the conversation, she says, putting her hand on a little table that is littered over with journals and magazines—

"You're fond of current literature, I see. Do you happen to have read any notices of—or to have seen any of Frank Forest's plays?"

"No—but I have heard of them often from a friend of his, my cousin Harry Bellairs, who is going to bring him here to dinner to-day!"

CHAPTER XVII.

"SHE COULDN'T BE MEAN!"

KATE'S first definite feeling is that she is not surprised. As soon as she hears that Harry Bellairs is Mrs. Durgan's cousin, Kate is conscious that an idea had already crossed her mind that he was the person to whom Mrs. Durgan had made reference as knowing her (Kate). As for their coming to dinner, well, she had almost been prepared for that too. "Are they all coming, I wonder?" she thinks, as she gazes abstractedly before her in silence, and Mrs. Durgan still refrains from watching her; "Frank and that young woman who found me out and went away in the carriage with him, and Harry Bellairs as their host."

Presently she asks—

"Is any one else staying with Captain Bellairs?"

"Not that I know of," Mrs. Durgan answers; "and I generally do know the number and the names of Harry's guests."

"I asked," Kate explains, "because a very pretty woman crossed in the steamer with me, and when we got out of the train at Dublin, I saw her go away in a carriage with Mr. Forest."

"In a carriage with Mr. Forest!" the pretty widow repeats, turning her usually pale face round quickly, and showing it to be rosy with annoyance and surprise now. "The carriage must have been Harry's; he didn't know when he was here yesterday that Mr. Forest was married again; but how do you know that it was Mr. Forest?"

"He is my cousin."

"Didn't you speak to him when you saw him?"

Kate shakes her head and laughs rather sadly. "We were in ignorance of each other's presence all the time we were on

board. I hardly know what I might have done if he had come near me. Can't you understand that cousins are sometimes glad to avoid one another?"

"Harry and I are never that," Mrs. Durgan says decidedly. "Oh, your mention of this unexpected pretty young woman, who may be Mr. Forest's new wife, is a very upsetting thing."

"Brides are objectionable as a rule," Kate says; "but I should think this is rather a good specimen of the genus, if she is a bride. Poor dear Frank! I hope she may be able to uproot the first wife's faction, for they're binding Frank most hopelessly in the tendrils of their family dominion and power." Then she goes on to tell Mrs. Durgan a little about Frank's brief married life, and Mrs. Durgan at the conclusion of the conversation is obliged unwillingly to dismiss from her mind the idea that had entered into it on the first blush of the subject, namely that Miss Mervyn was in love with the talented author of "Duplicity." A little qualm contracts her

heart for an instant as she renounces this idea, and thinks simultaneously—

"I wonder what Harry will think of her? Has my Cousin Harry ever said much about me, or anything about me to you?" she says carelessly, after a time. "He has spoken to me of having met you under rather sad circumstances, I believe, when that poor Mr. Angerstein died?"

"I had seen him before then," Kate says. "No, he has never spoken to me of you. I heard him say once he had no sister: that is the only time he mentioned his family to me."

"He never did say much about me, I believe, while my husband was alive," Mrs. Durgan says in a low voice. "Harry didn't like Mr. Durgan," she continues, abruptly putting her hand on Kate's.

"Didn't he?" Kate says in her direct and most uninterested tone; and Mrs. Durgan relinquishes the idea of telling something which she feels strangely impelled to tell to her new companion.

Meanwhile Kate goes on assiduously petting and patting the mare Guinevere, which has been named—she feels sure of this now—by her old lover, in memory of that other mare which carried her from Torquay to meet him, in those early days when her love was as strong and wild as the pace at which she rode.

"Yet Mr. Durgan was his own cousin, I am only his cousin by marriage," Mrs. Durgan goes on, dwelling on the subject with what Kate feels to be most tiresome pertinacity; "he is the next heir, I have only a life interest in this place; that is to say, he is going to let me live here as long as I please, just as if I were the rightful owner; but Harry Bellairs is the real master of Breagh Place."

"He's not a man to care about settling anywhere I should think," Kate says; "the restlessness of a sailor is grafted on that of an Irishman. I can't fancy Captain Bellairs settling down as a country gentleman."

"Can't you? I can," Mrs. Durgan says;

"and I can't fancy any one settling down more delightfully than he will in time; he's very fond of all kinds of sport, you know, and with a wife who sympathizes with that sort of thing——"

"But he may never get a wife who sympathizes with that sort of thing," Kate says, thinking of herself solely still, and remembering how very improbable it is that he will ever seek her again, though she could sympathize with him so rapturously if only she had the unassailable right to do so. Whereat Mrs. Durgan gives her head a little shake of acquiescence, and says—

"Ah! no; true. It's all uncertain, of course, but we live in hope."

"What an unselfish woman she must be," Kate thinks admiringly; "she never fears for a moment that a wife entirely after his own heart might take a fancy for living at Breagh Place." She likes Mrs. Durgan better than ever for this proof of her guileless, boundless confidence in Harry Bellairs. Nevertheless, though she admires Mrs. Dur-

gan, her heart throbs exultantly as she reflects that he has never confided to her the secret of his penchant for the chestnut mare called Guinevere.

It is a nervous hour for Kate Mervyn, that last one before dinner this day. They may arrive at any moment from half-past six to half-past seven, Mrs. Durgan has told her, and Kate finds that her curiosity and anxiety become unmanageable as the time approaches. She fully realizes that though on the one hand this réunion may be intensely and excitingly pleasant, it may on the other be most depressingly disagreeable. It must, indeed, of necessity be this latter thing, if both these men, who have in former days taken such a strong personal interest in her, develop anything like indifference to her now, or even worse, betray as strong a personal interest in any one else. "If they think that I've come here in search of either of them, what a hopeless goose I shall appear in their eyes," she says to herself, as, unwillingly enough, she goes out from the

sanctuary of her own room down to the dreaded meeting.

It is all cool, quiet, fresh, and sweetly perfumed with flowers in the drawing-room, to which instinct leads her, but beyond this drawing-room there is a conservatory, brilliant with bloom, and thickly hung with luxuriant creeping plants. From this conservatory there proceeds a light rippling sound—a woman's voice raised in the mirthful recital of some incident that has evidently amused her.

"You'll both agree that I have not indulged in what Harry calls my 'customary exaggeration,' when you see her," Mrs. Durgan is saying—"a woman I could love and be intensely jealous of, and trust thoroughly, for she couldn't be mean."

Kate hears all this unwillingly enough as she approaches, for Mrs. Durgan's tones are rapid, and her enunciation remarkably distinct. But she determines to make her presence known without further delay, and spare herself the pain, and possibly the

mortification, of hearing either of them reply. She pushes open the lightly swinging door and through the masses of bloom and greenery advances into their midst.

There is genuine pleasure in Frank's start from his ordinary lounging indolence, into animation and actively expressed pleasure. "Kate, my darling!" he exclaims, coming forward to meet her: forgetful, as her hands join his eagerly extended ones in cordial greeting, that she is not his darling at all; that she has in fact distinctly refused to be so; and that he has during the last few days allowed himself to be forced into a sort of friendly alliance with Miss Grange.

"I'm inevitable, am I not?" Kate says quickly; "please don't think that I planned a surprise though, Frank. As soon as I heard you were coming to-day, I told Mrs. Durgan that you were my cousin, and I thought she would have told you that I was here."

All this time as she speaks, Kate, with a loving woman's natural inclination to hold

fast to some one who loves her, has left her hand passively in Frank's; and all this time Captain Bellairs has watched the pair, and marked the attitude with jealous attention.

"I meet another old friend in you," Kate says, half questioningly, turning to him. Then, as something in his manner (is it distrust of her or himself?) chills her off from him, she shakes off her embarrassment as well as she can, and addresses Mrs. Durgan in lowered tones that are inaudible to the two men.

"I heard what you said as I came along, I'm sorry, but I couldn't help it; I want to tell you you're right in one thing—you may trust me."

The quartette are sufficiently at ease with one another to be all together, as it were, in the conversation during dinner. Mrs. Durgan is as far from being a snob as it is possible for a human being to be; still she holds Kate in rather higher estimation than she would have done, had she not discovered that Kate is Frank Forest's cousin, and that

the power and intention are Kate's to make a name for herself that will not be inferior to Frank's own. But happily as they unite during dinner, they fall apart with a beautiful apparent want of design by-and-by in the garden, when Frank and Kate stroll away among the evergreens in the moonlight, and Harry Bellairs remains by the side of Mrs. Durgan's chair.

"You have liked that girl very much at one time or other, Harry," the widow begins, as soon as the other pair are out of earshot, "and I don't wonder at it, for as I said just now, she's a darling."

"I have liked her very much, I always shall like her very much; she's a girl I can talk to on any subject as easily as I can to a man."

"How long is it since you have left off more than liking her?" she asks quietly.

"You have a reason for asking this," he says reproachfully; "come, Georgie, tell it to me."

Her eyes rest affectionately on his for a

moment or two, and he cannot help feeling that they would be very true, tender eyes to which to turn for light along his life-path. Then she averts them, and says—

"Have you told Mr. Forest anything about me?"

"Only that you're awfully nice and clever, and one of the dearest and best little women in the world."

"That's very uncompromising," she laughs; "that's a phrase you apply to every woman who pleases you and listens to you, and seems to like you. Well, Harry, I want you to promise that you won't say more than this about me to him, until I give you leave."

"As you please, Georgie dear," he says with cheerful alacrity, and her heart sinks a little as she hears him, and sees that his eyes are straining themselves in the direction of that gap in the hedge of shrubs that bounds one side of the lawn, through which the other cousins have disappeared.

"Will you go and bring them back for tea and music?" she says quickly; "and before

you go, call Ryan to wheel me back to the drawing-room. Oh dear! when shall I be independent of Ryan? You don't ask for Guinevere; by the way, Miss Mervyn tells me she had a chestnut mare once called Guinevere."

"I know it."

"Did you know the mare?"

"I did," he says, rising up. "Come, Georgie, it's getting damp; I'll call Ryan, and go and bring the truants back, though perhaps they will not thank me for interfering."

She is wheeled in to her drawing-room and her reflections, while he strolls away over the lawn, feeling half angrily that he has put himself in a false position by coming at all. All dread of interrupting a semi-sentimental interview departs from him, however, as soon as he comes near enough to them to hear their voices. Frank is describing the present state of his bondage to the Granges, and Kate is laughing heartily.

"They have quartered themselves at Bray," Frank says, "and Miss Grange has, in the quietest way possible, made me promise on Bellairs's behalf, that she may come to his house, and make sketches of his dining-hall and music-room. I can't dislike her you know, Kate, but I see what they're all about as plainly as if it were written down. Charlotte's an awfully clever girl; she didn't tell me she had been with you all night on deck when we crossed. I suppose she couldn't find out who you were."

"My dear Frank," Kate says, as Harry Bellairs joins them, "Miss Grange must have found me very easy reading. I think you'll marry her, but I hope you won't," she continues candidly. "She'll protect you from the rest, perhaps, but she'll be an appalling guardian angel."

"She's the last girl in the world I'd marry," Frank says decidedly, "but you don't know what a nice sensible girl she is, Kate; just the kind of girl a fellow can have a friendship with, without her trying to turn

it into anything else. She has behaved splendidly, though she must see as plainly as I do, what the others are aiming at."

"She's aiming at it as cleverly as the others are," Captain Bellairs says coldly. "You can make the arrow glance aside if you like, Miss Mervyn," he adds in a whisper.

Kate turns an angry appealing face to him. Does he want her to marry her cousin? Does he want to pique her by merely pretending to wish her to do so? How can she tell? All she can bring herself to say is—

"Don't make a mistake, Frank; and now come in and give Mrs. Durgan an account of the unpremeditated way in which the Granges accompanied you, when you tried to flee from them."

Somehow or other the four do not amalgamate as well, when they get themselves together in the drawing-room after this, as they did at dinner. Mrs. Durgan is not exactly depressed, but she is quieter than

usual: and when an extremely vivacious woman is quieter than usual, she has an excessively depressing effect on those who are accustomed to her vivacity. As it happens, Captain Bellairs is thoroughly accustomed to her vivacious moods; consequently this unwonted fit of quiet strikes him as being awkward, inopportune, and unpleasant altogether. Kate is weary with the weariness that comes on after great excitement, and cannot rouse herself to be at her best before the man whom she feels with a heart-sickening pang is as dear to her as ever he has been—the man between whom and herself an unknown something has thrown a shadow which seems to be separating them more widely than ever. "If he would only make some reference to what has passed, and let me know for certain that he means it to be all over, I'd never wince," she tells herself; "but to go on like this and never to know whether he thinks me to blame or not, or what he thinks about it, is horribly hard."

As for Frank, he is silent from various causes. Now that he has found Kate here, and discovered Mrs. Durgan to be a brilliant and amusing companion when she chooses, he feels that he is no longer dependent for pleasing female society on the delightful but possibly dangerous Charlotte Grange.

"I won't stay at home while she's sketching his antique furniture and carved ceilings, and I'll see if that will choke her off," he tells himself; and he makes up his mind that he will disabuse Kate of the notion that as he cannot have her, he will meekly accept his fate at the hands of the first woman who tries to teach him how to throw the handkerchief.

He is roused from his reverie by hearing Mrs. Durgan say, "Then we lunch with you to-morrow, Harry. I shall try and persuade Miss Mervyn to ride Guinevere; it will do my poor little mare so much good to have a lady on her back again."

"I'll come over and fetch her then," says Captain Bellairs; and though she makes a

protest against riding, on the score of having no habit, she is overruled by Mrs. Durgan, who has one that she "is sure will fit" to lend.

"My progress is so slow in my invalid carriage," Mrs. Durgan says, holding her hand out to Kate when the two men are gone this night, "that I couldn't have the heart to tire you out on your way for the first time to Harry's place; besides I want to see how you two look together on horseback."

Kate remains silent. All appears to be fair and above-board, but she cannot make up her mind as to whether it is all the result of accident or design, as to whether she is skating on thin ice or walking on firm ground. "I only know that I'll play fair," she tells herself, "but oh! to be alone with him once again!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RIDE OVER.

The feelings with which Kate puts on the habit which Mrs. Durgan insists upon lending her, are not solely pleasurable. In the first place the habit does not fit her to that degree of perfection which is essential to the happiness of a thorough horsewoman. This, though a minor grievance, is one that stings when it is superadded to others. In the second place, she cannot help remembering that the last time she appeared in a habit before Captain Bellairs was on the occasion of that befalling her which they can neither of them forget while memory is their portion. Lastly, there is a slight sense of humiliation to her in the fact that these wings where-

with she is flying now are not her own, and Kate is woman enough to abhor borrowed plumage and a feeling of obligation. Mrs. Durgan's is a good and magnanimous position. She is generously attempting to put Kate in the best light. But Kate feels that the light is a trying one, and shrinks from taking her stand in it, with a sensitiveness that she would declare to be morbid in another person.

She has appealed against the dictum which has gone forth, that she shall ride over alone with Captain Bellairs, and her appeal has been made in vain. Mrs. Durgan, who has quite recovered her lightheartedness this morning, has met and combated each objection as it has been advanced. "It will be a mercy to the mare," she says; "she has had nothing cleverer on her back for months than a groom, and I long to see how she looks at her best again, and she will look at her best with you on her."

A good many of the meaner feelings of dissatisfaction dissolve into thin air as soon

as Kate finds herself in the saddle. She forgets that the habit does not fit properly; she forgets that the mare bounding beneath her is not her own, and that she is in the place she likes best in the world by the grace of a stranger, who is, to a certain degree, her rival. She sways to the movement of the slinging galloper, with as unrestrained a sense of enjoyment as she ever experienced in the old days, when the horse she rode was her own, and she was unsubdued by failure and disappointment, by mortification and baffled love. So thoroughly is she carried away by this first flavour of the long untasted pleasure, that Captain Bellairs, looking at her as they pull up at the lodge gates of Breagh Place, sees in her only the Kate of the past, and forgets everything (his cousin included) but that past, and his passionate enjoyment of it.

"We only want the sound of the swirl of the waves in that semicircular bay, to make us believe that we are back in the old times on the Torbay road," he says, as they go

more soberly through the gate and out into the highway.

"Just for the moment we might believe it," Kate says, looking straight ahead of her, "because we neither of us are half as much altered as we deserve to be, considering all we've gone through; but the illusion wouldn't last for more than a moment with me—illusions never do."

"What made you stand out against riding over to-day?" he asks abruptly, disregarding her cautionary remark respecting illusions.

"I acquiesced meekly enough in the plan before you," she says; and she does long to give him one look which shall assure him that riding alone with him is a pleasure that is as dear to her as ever. But she remembers the blithe assent of Mrs. Durgan, and refrains, for has not Mrs. Durgan said this of her (Kate), "She couldn't be mean"?

"But my cousin tells me she had an infinity of trouble in getting you to stick to your agreement this morning; why was it, Kate? tell me."

"It was a natural desire to do the right thing for once in my life," Kate says, and her face smarts with a blush of emotion, and she feels the tears standing in her eyes. "If they drop, and he sees them, what an emotional fool he'll think me," she tells herself rebukingly. "What on earth did I consent to go through this trial by fire for? I might have known that I should get scorched."

"So you think it a wrong thing even to ride with me any more," he says rather mournfully. "Kate! do let such poor feeling as may exist still linger on—don't kill it by violence."

"I can't hold the mare," she says, slackening the snaffle, and Guinevere goes off at a pace that mercifully spares her rider the necessity of replying to her companion's last remark.

They come to an ugly declivity presently, down which it would be suicidal to do other than walk the thoroughbred mare. With an undiplomatically visible desire to avoid

the former topic, Kate starts a fresh one as soon as they pull up.

"I want you to tell me all you know about Frank and this Miss Grange," she begins.

"What an interest you take in Frank!"

"I do."

She says it very earnestly, and then pauses and makes up her mind to tell out the tale of her own weakness as freely as it can possibly be told.

"I do! I take such a hearty interest in him, that I am longing to see the girl, and to find out how he stands with her. You know I had a stronger love for Frank once than mere cousinly affection," she continues, looking up at him; "and though that died out, it has vitalized the cousinly affection to such a degree that it will last in all its intensity while I live."

"Perhaps, after all, you only mistook cousinly affection for something warmer," he says, hoping she will accept his amendment and agree with him.

"I tell you no," she says impatiently; "what is the use of trying to tone down what was an error of feeling, and make it appear like a mere error of judgment. I fell in love with my cousin against every law of reason and of right, and I was punished by knowing that he was ten times more unhappy in his marriage afterwards than he would have been if I had never done so; the truth in this case isn't a pleasant thing to tell, but it is better to tell it."

Captain Bellairs is silent, and devotes great attention to the way his horse steps down a little precipice. He feels in this instance that he could have borne to have had the truth withheld from him.

"Why didn't Frank come with you this morning?" Kate asks, as the silence grows embarrassing.

"He preferred waiting at home, to hold Miss Grange's paint-box, I believe."

"Did you leave her, then, with him?" Kate questions with a laughing air of amusement, which proves her heart free now, at

all events, concerning Frank, and so is delightfully reassuring to her present companion.

"No; but she was announced as coming by her sister-in-law, Mrs. Grange, who wrote to ask Frank if from twelve to two would be a convenient time for Charlotte to see the house. I asked him to invite them to lunch. Was I right, or do you wish me to try and keep them apart?" he adds jealously.

"Do you think I'd be mean enough to interpose a finger between him and a heart's desire of his?" she says hotly; "and do you think I'd be doubly mean enough to ask you to do it for me? I have a kind of feeling against her which may be unjust and unfounded, after all; but she found out who I was that night on the steamer, and hadn't the candour to tell me Frank was on board. This may be natural reserve on her part, but it looks like sneaking meanness."

"Your first impression of her was good, was it?"

"Agreeable, certainly. I am taken always with good looks and gentle manners: she has both."

"And you cling to first impressions, after the manner of women, probably, and go back to them with a rush, even if you find occasion to alter them?" he asks.

"Indeed I don't. I'm ready to renounce an opinion or a liking in an instant, if I find either ill-founded."

"What was your first impression of Mrs. Durgan?"

"That she'll never deceive me," Kate answers, with heightened colour; "and that if she takes a dislike to me she'll have done with me at once, but will never try to undermine or injure me. She's as clear as the air she lives in."

"I have known her a good many years now," he says slowly; "I knew her before I met you, Kate."

"Yes?"

"And I've always found her to be just what you describe—a warm friend and an

honest foe. Not that she has any foes, poor girl; Georgie Durgan gets good words from all men and women."

"Was she married when you knew her first?" Kate asks hesitatingly.

"Yes; I went to stay with them when my cousin Christopher Durgan brought her home as a bride. I wondered then how it was she had consented to yoke herself with such a prig as he was; and I wondered more at the way she bore the yoke as time went on, and he proved himself to be one of the most wearying fools that ever wore out a woman's affection."

"She'll marry again," Kate says in the tone of a prophetess. Then she laughs at the unintentional tone of solemnity she has employed, and fails to observe that Captain Bellairs takes no notice of her remark.

"You must keep that mare in exercise," he says, as they come upon grass again and break into a canter. "Georgie will be grateful to you for doing it. I shall be delighted, because I shall have to be your

escort in default of a better one, and you will have the satisfaction of feeling that you're obliging two people——"

"And of tasting forbidden fruit," she interrupts.

"Why say 'forbidden,' when it's freely proffered?"

She shakes her head.

"My conscience tells me—yes, I have a conscience, though I dare say you doubt it—that there is a flavour of forbidden fruit about it; doesn't yours?" she says suddenly. But his horse jibs wildly at the moment, and he is too much occupied in quieting him to answer her.

It is ten miles from Breagh Place to Lugnaquilla—Captain Bellairs' home in the heart of the Wicklow mountains. That is to say, it is ten miles by the rather wild riding-road along which he has brought his companion. Mrs. Durgan, who has driven along the shorter high-road, is there some time before them—is there long enough, in fact, to feel depression again assailing her

usually light heart, about something which she will not permit herself to analyze.

Kate comes in, looking too much like the Kate of old for the attention of every one present not to be concentrated on her admiringly. Frank leaves the side of a lady by whom he is standing to come and meet his cousin; and the lady, looking round from her occupation of sketching some richly-carved panelling, bows her head with a half smile as she recognizes her fellow voyager in Kate. Mr. and Mrs. Grange come forward in perplexity. They are in doubt as to how they shall treat this most obnoxious member of Frank's family; for the fact of her arriving in company with their host, and being altogether treated as an honoured guest, throws them out in their preconceived calculations. They had imagined that as a mere dependant, as Mrs. Durgan's companion, she might be flouted with impunity. To find the dangerous beauty made an object of consideration is confusing.

"You were quite right," Kate says,

making her way at once to the side of the sofa on which Mrs. Durgan is lying, looking pitifully pale and helpless by contrast with Kate's heightened bloom and vigour. "I forgot that the mare wasn't my own as soon as I was fairly off, and I enjoyed the road and the ride as thoroughly as if she had been."

"And your cavalier?" Mrs. Durgan asks, smiling.

"My cavalier was all that you, in your kindness, could wish my cavalier to be," Kate says unflinchingly. She would give worlds at this juncture to be able to reassure Mrs. Durgan, and assuage any fears Mrs. Durgan may possibly be feeling relative to this reunion between herself and Harry Bellairs. But Mrs. Durgan has not given her the right to do so, and she dare not assume the right.

Placid, fair-haired, white-skinned Charlotte Grange rises slowly and comes forward now, reminding every one as she comes of a white pussy-cat who purrs before it springs. At least, they are reminded of the pussy-cat,

of its softness and calm, winning ways; but they utterly forget its springing and scratching proclivities.

"I have done nothing but regret that I didn't know you were Mr. Forest's cousin, the other night," she says.

"But you must have known it," Kate says out incautiously, for she is yet a tyro in the art of dealing with white pussy-cats. "I told you my name and occupation. Surely, Frank," she continues, turning to her cousin, who is beginning to feel hot and uncomfortable, "you haven't 'kept me dark,' as you call it?—Miss Grange must have heard you mention me?"

"Over and over again," Frank states with awkward emphasis; and Miss Grange shakes her head with the plaited crown of golden tinted tresses on it, and says—

"Mr. Forest forgets how very limited our intercourse has been; he has not had time to mention any subject, however much it may be in his mind, 'over and over' again to me."

"'Limited,' do you call it?" her brother puts in, with what he designs to be an air of mirthful raillery, but which in reality is coarsely suggestive. "Considering the time, I call it anything but 'limited,' Mrs. Durgan; they're never apart, I assure you."

But Charlotte subdues him at once by one of her long, steady glances.

"My brother has the knack of saying the thing that comes uppermost invariably when that thing is specially void of point," she says in a low voice to Kate; "these vapid jokes are, of course, of no importance whatever to Mr. Forest, but they are repulsive to me to the last degree."

"They're just so much empty sound; don't let yourself be annoyed by them," Kate says cordially, taking off her hat, and flinging it down. There is something in the womanly aspect, in the womanly quiet and apparent gentleness of this Miss Grange, which appeals to all Kate's strong womanly sympathies. "It is shameful," the latter feels, "for her own kin to put her in the position of the

pursuer. I believe Frank is sorry for her too," Kate thinks as she glances round, and sees that Frank looks more abashed than the occasion seems to warrant.

Mrs. Durgan's sofa is wheeled up to the table when luncheon is ready. There are two covers laid side by side at the head of the table, and for a moment Miss Grange wavers about Frank, and wonders whether this honour of sitting by him is designed for her by her host. In another moment doubt is set at rest, for Captain Bellairs gives his arm to Kate, and leads her to the coveted post. As he does so his eyes turn to Georgie Durgan, and Georgie gives him what looks like a bright smile of encouragement—but at what a cost?

END OF VOL. II.

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